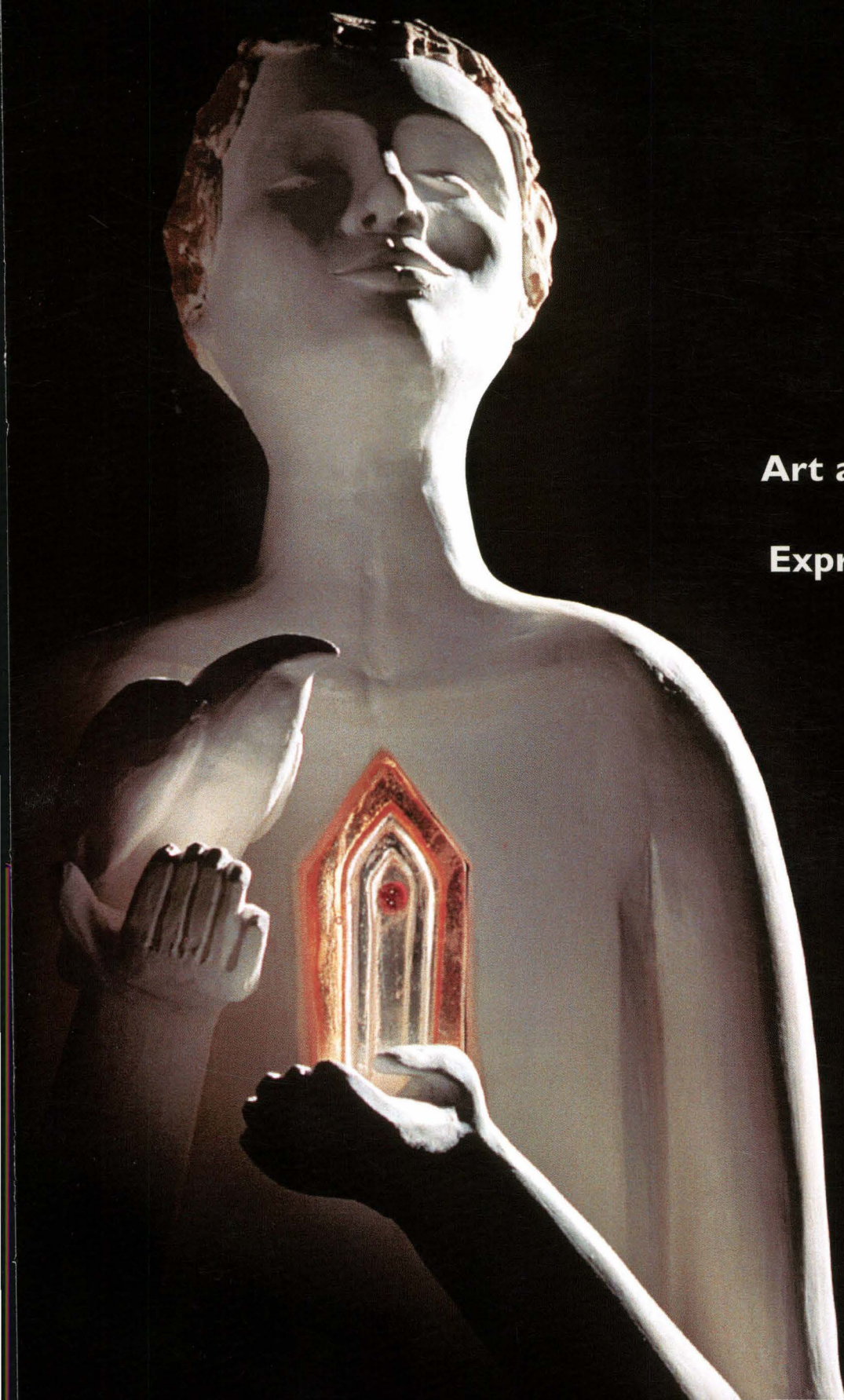


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THRESHOLDS

Art and the Spiritual

**Expressions of Art &
Spiritual Life**



THRESHOLDS

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STATE DOCUMENTS

Thresholds: Expressions of Art & Spiritual Life

City Gallery at Waterfront Park

34 Prioleau Street, Charleston, SC

December 4, 2003 - February 1, 2004

A joint project of the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, Kentucky Arts Council, North Carolina Arts Council, South Carolina Arts Commission and the Tennessee Arts Commission.

The exhibition is supported, in part, by The National Bank of South Carolina, the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs and the South Carolina Arts Foundation.

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Cover image: Christine Clark (Chiwa), *Peace in the Temple* (detail). Photo: Robert Batey

THRESHOLDS

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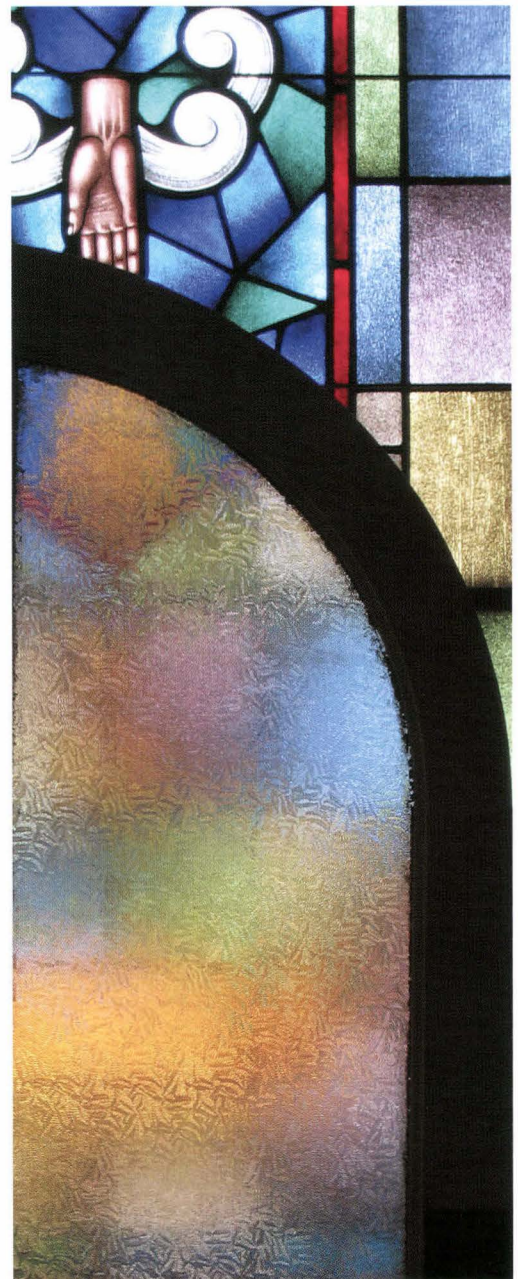
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Foreword

SPIRES of almost every style punctuate this city's otherwise low-slung skyline. They are the dominant features in an architectural and cultural landscape that merges religion, commerce, government, education, and private life within the boundaries of a small southern peninsula. There is much to attract one's attention in Charleston, but it seems to be the steeples that continually draw the eye upward over this "Holy City."

So it is appropriate that *Thresholds: Expressions of Art & Spiritual Life* originates in Charleston. This most hospitable of southern cities was founded on religious tolerance and continues to this day to host practitioners of many beliefs, savoring the richness they add to the community, and facing the inherent challenges that come with diversity. But



Americans everywhere are being challenged to think beyond their traditional belief systems. International conflicts demand that we gain more understanding of cultures where values and traditions are very different from our own – and are deeply rooted in religion. In our own communities, we live and learn with neighbors who may not share our beliefs and customs. So *Thresholds* is not about Charleston – it is about all of us.

That is why I am so pleased that Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina and Tennessee have joined South Carolina in producing this exhibition. These states have sent some of their finest artists to contribute a broad range of thought-provoking work. When the exhibition leaves Charleston, it travels to venues in these states, where I hope the conversations it provokes will broaden to address issues important to each of those communities.

I want to express my deepest thanks to curator Eleanor Heartney, who saw the potential for creating this exhibition and presenting it in a way that acknowledges and involves the diverse communities that inspired it. I am particularly pleased with the partnerships developed with ten places of worship in Charleston which expands the potential for the exhibition

to reach new audiences. Special thanks go to the collaborating states that are making this exhibition possible; to the arts council staff members in each of those states who are involved in taking this exhibition to far-flung locations; to the staff of the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs; and especially to the staff of the South Carolina Arts Commission who have contributed much to making *Thresholds* a reality.

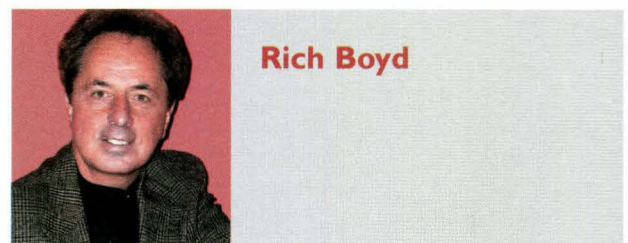
The South Carolina Arts Commission is proud to have coordinated *Thresholds* in the shadows of Charleston's steeples. It is my hope that in Charleston and the many other venues where this exhibition is seen, we may find the commonalities in artistic and religious expression that will draw all of us closer together.

Suzette M. Surkamer is the executive director of the South Carolina Arts Commission

THE arts are alive in the Volunteer State! From the majestic mountains of East Tennessee to the fertile delta of West Tennessee and in every region in between, Tennessee is home to thousands of artists whose work fortifies the cultural fabric and heritage of our communities and our nation.

Providing novel and rewarding opportunities for professional artists is a priority of the Tennessee Arts Commission. We are pleased to be among the state arts agencies invited to partner with the South Carolina Arts Commission to present *Thresholds: Expressions of Art and Spiritual Life*. This exhibition, which features the work of nine Tennessee artists, reflects the complex intermingling of visual art, religion, and spirituality during a time when arts and religious leaders are exploring new ways of collaborating to impact the well-being of their communities.

Much like the community leadership evidenced in *Thresholds*, the Tennessee Arts Commission is also committed to enhancing citizen's quality of life by investing public dollars



in Tennessee artists and their work. To recognize contemporary artists and to encourage their continued, creative growth, the Commission offers direct financial assistance through its Professional Artists Support and Individual Artist Fellowship programs. The Commission also supports artists who provide students and teachers with direct, hands-on arts experiences that explore the creative process through the Artist in Residency Program.

To further promote the work of Tennessee's visual artists, the Commission maintains a public gallery space for artists to share the fruits of their labor. Artworks exhibited in the Tennessee Arts Commission Gallery are frequently purchased and added to the State's collection.

In addition to exhibitions hosted in our own Gallery, the Commission presents Tennesseans artworks in other traditional and non-traditional settings. In partnership with the Tennessee State Museum, large-scale exhibitions, such as *The Best of Tennessee*, are displayed. Works of art have also become the focal point of the State's premier social and political events. The Three Star Inaugural Gala of newly elected Governor Phil Bredesen provided a showcase for over one hundred of the state's finest artists. The Commission is collaborating with First Lady Andrea Conte on several exciting projects that feature the state's rich and diverse artistic community.

The work of Tennessee's artists adds to the state's vibrancy. The vitality of these artists' contributions visible in *Thresholds: Expressions of Art and Spiritual Life* is proof that the Volunteer state is a good place to live, work and create.

*Rich Boyd is the executive director
of the Tennessee Arts Commission*

THE relationship of art and religion is an interesting topic for all of us who live, work and create in the South, where our cultural landscape is heavily influenced by Christian fundamentalism. Memorable contemporary works dealing with this subject have evoked deep emotional and long lasting reactions. Who among us does not continue to cringe when we hear the name Andres Serrano or Robert Mapplethorpe? Even in rural Kentucky, just a couple of years ago, a small but feisty arts council sponsored a juried exhibition around the title *Beatitudes Betrayed*. It was



Gerri Combs

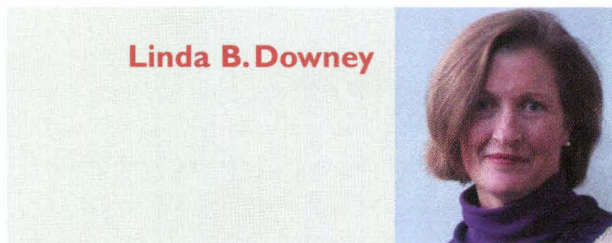
followed by a deluge of letters to the editor and visits from the town fathers, who threatened to discontinue funding. Yet, the discussions that erupted were probably the first in that community to revolve around art in its deepest sense, and perhaps moved both artists and other local residents to a different level of understanding; however wary of each other they may remain.

I have not begun by talking about controversy because *Thresholds: Expressions of Art and Spiritual Life* might prove to be controversial. Instead, I believe the exhibition provides a rich forum for public dialogue because of its theme and the installation of portions of the exhibition in places of worship. The Kentucky Arts Council is very pleased and excited to have this opportunity for Kentucky artists to share their vision in a regional exhibition of such high caliber that will travel to other participating states after its closing in Charleston, South Carolina. My hope is that *Thresholds* becomes a memorable and thought provoking experience for all who have an opportunity to see the exhibition.

*Gerri Combs is the executive director
of the Kentucky Arts Council*

THE Florida Department of State is pleased to partner with other state arts agencies from the south in the exhibition, *Thresholds: Expressions of Art & Spiritual Life*. The South Carolina Arts Commission is to be commended for spearheading the organization of this groundbreaking project and for inviting artists from other southern states to play a part in exploring the connection between art and spirituality. Collaborations and partnerships like these provide the energy for future achievements in the arts as states link with other states, partner with local governments, and join with private and non-profit organizations to create new and exciting cultural opportunities.

Florida is fortunate that many extremely talented artists call it home. Our state embraces the creative spirit of the individual artist and provides fertile ground for artistic expression. The Department of State's Office of Cultural and Historical Programs recognizes the importance of the role of



the individual artist in strengthening our state's communities and supports and nurtures these valuable individual cultural resources. Florida's artists can exhibit their work through our Capitol Complex Exhibition Program, have their work selected for purchase or commission in our Art in State Buildings Program, and be chosen for monetary awards through our Individual Artists Fellowship Program.

As a result of state support, the arts, in turn, strengthen Florida's neighborhoods by fostering partnerships with other community-based organizations and by providing cultural and educational opportunities for Florida's youth and families. A culturally vibrant community also attracts new businesses, jobs, and tourists, while bringing huge economic development benefits to our state.

We are proud of the Florida artists that were selected for this prestigious exhibition. We congratulate them on the opportunity to share their unique visions with the thousands of viewers who will experience this exhibition as it travels throughout the south.

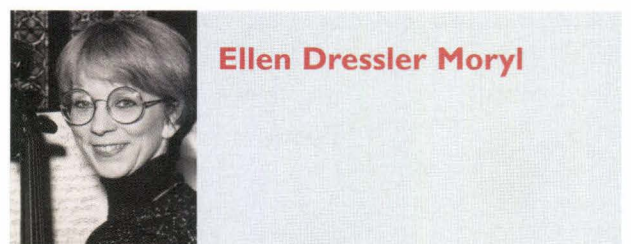
*Linda B. Downey is the director of the Division of Cultural Affairs
Office of Cultural & Historical Programs
Florida Department of State*

CHARLESTON is appropriately dubbed the Holy City because of its long tradition of religious tolerance and cultural diversity. Over its 300-year history, Charleston has provided fertile ground for the establishment of many Christian denomination churches, a number of historic Jewish synagogues and more recently, several Islamic mosques. With

all of that in mind, it seemed appropriate that the new City Gallery at Waterfront Park was selected for the exhibition of *Thresholds*, which focuses on a wide variety of paintings, sculpture, and site specific artworks inspired by religious belief and spirituality.

The beautiful setting of the City Gallery adds an extra dimension to the experience of the viewer with its breathtaking view of the Charleston Harbor and the Atlantic Ocean in the distance. The aura of natural beauty of the gallery's physical site at the water's edge has its own inherent spirituality leading to what we hope to be transcendent moments of contemplation and introspection for the viewers of the *Thresholds* exhibition.

Thresholds brings together works by 54 of the leading contemporary artists from the Southern United States. The core of the exhibition is featured in the City Gallery with additional works located in off-site venues including some of Charleston's most beautiful churches and synagogues in the downtown section of the city. It is important to note that virtually all of these places of worship are frequently used during the Piccolo Spoleto and MOJA Arts Festivals as performance venues for concerts and festival programs. This underscores the strong collaborative partnerships that have flourished between Charleston's religious community and the City's Office of Cultural Affairs, which, together, have created and presented substantial cultural programming to the citizens of Charleston.



We extend our gratitude and appreciation to Eleanor Heartney, whose concept and vision for *Thresholds*, and depth of understanding of the subject matter sparked enthusiasm and support for the project. I would also like to thank the South Carolina Arts Commission for serving as the lead arts agency in the organization of the exhibition; and the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, Kentucky Arts Council, North Carolina Arts Council and Tennessee Arts Commission for partnering in *Thresholds* to bring a regional appeal to the exhibition.

Special recognition must go to Charleston's Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., for his visionary leadership in making the arts a top priority of his administration and for conceptualizing the City Gallery at Waterfront Park which is the most ideal space that we know of to launch this thought-provoking visual arts exhibition.

Finally, congratulations to the artists whose works are presented in the exhibition. Individually and collectively, their work expresses ideals and values through various media, raising the consciousness of the viewers about the meaning of life and existence which will make every person, who comes to view it, better for the experience.

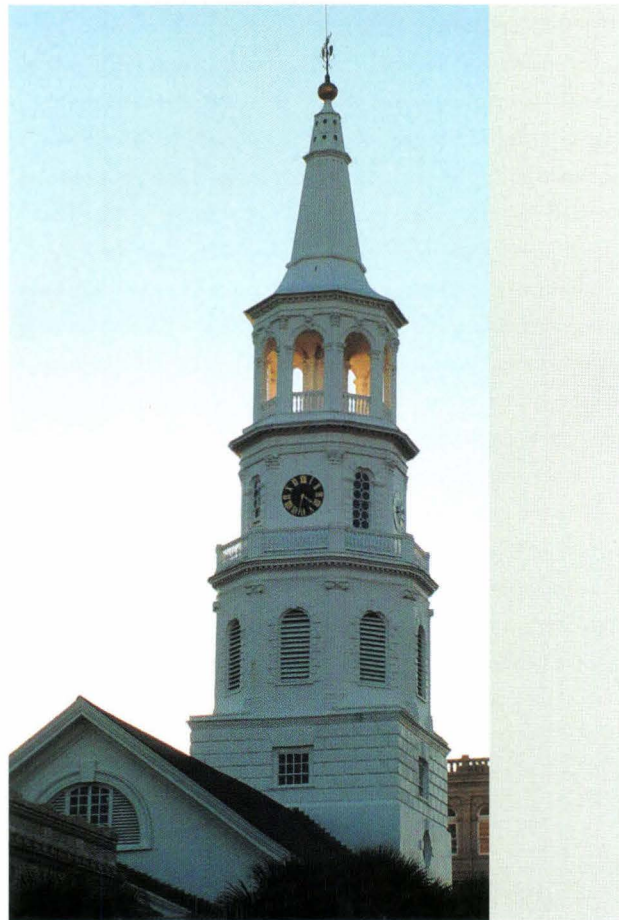
*Ellen Dressler Moryl is director of the City of Charleston
Office of Cultural Affairs*

DANA Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, says, "A great nation deserves great art." We are lucky in North Carolina to have a bountiful supply. The arts improve the health of both our state's economy and our citizens. Just as importantly, the arts help us interpret the world around us; and when it is time to problem-solve, they help us "think outside the box."

We take pride in the fact that the South boasts a vibrant arts and cultural life, evidenced by the strong work of the artists in our creative industry. These talented leaders contribute fresh perspectives, stimulating people throughout our region to incorporate the arts into their daily lives.

The public benefits when artists, galleries, local governments, and state and regional arts agencies work together on an exhibition like *Thresholds: Expressions of Art & Spiritual Life*. As this exhibition travels, it takes with it a sense of the strong partnerships that helped in its creation.

Art, and those who make art, exemplify the independent expression and the pursuit of happiness that are so much a part of the American experience. As Albert Einstein once said, "Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by

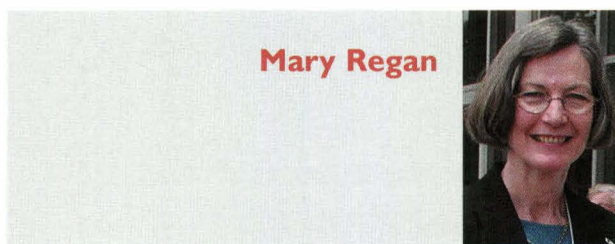


the individual who can labor in freedom." When the creative spark is nurtured, life-changing experiences result.

The arts make our communities special, our people productive, and help keep us a free and democratic society. We acknowledge and admire those who create that art. Their work forges cross-cultural understanding and connects us to a wider world.

When tomorrow's historians look at North Carolina's cultural life, they will find evidence of a treasure trove of art and artists that marks our state as a great place to live or visit. From traditional to contemporary art and all things in between, the arts in North Carolina have a rich past and an exciting future.

*Mary B. Regan is the executive director
of the North Carolina Arts Council*



Introduction

Harriett Green

THRESHOLDS is a visual journey, an exploration of sorts, into the psyche and spiritual and religious inclinations of artists whose beliefs are essentially based in the higher order of things. Situated somewhere between the abstract notion of spirituality and the more concrete belief in specific religious practices, a myriad of possible truths exists about man's place in the realm of the earthly and the divine. Contemporary offerings manifested in the works of fifty-four artists, provide some rationale for a natural ordering, or at least, attempt to address mankind's relational value in the universe of religious ideology; scientific exploration, humanism and ecumenism.

In the works of these artists, a diversity of religious beliefs and practices serves as reminders of the complex nature of this subject. It also points out that the continuous dialogue about religion serves to break down barriers and clears the way to universal understanding. The social and political underpinnings of the spiritual premise of *Thresholds*

When viewed against the backdrop of politics and international conflicts, the dialogue between art and religion shifts in order to expose the social, political, and cultural justification for religious fanaticism.

As a starting point for understanding the collection of work comprising *Thresholds*, Eleanor Heartney, in her essay, "Art and the Spiritual," examines the many manifestations of spiritual notions. From culturally based religious traditions to a more personal spirituality, Heartney guides us through the spectrum of belief systems and establishes a new set of talking points for religious diversity.

The confluence of the artists' work, religion and spirituality is articulated by the artists, themselves, in statements appearing in the catalogue section of the magazine. These statements contextualize the work and serve as guides to broadening our collective understanding.

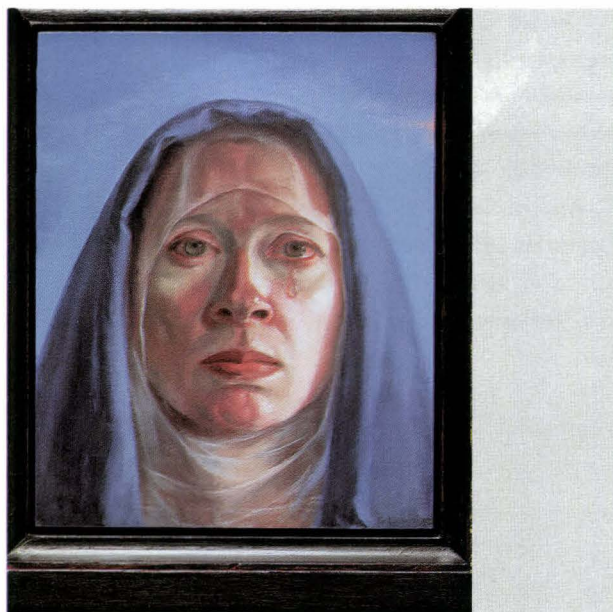
To support the widespread interest in the relationship between art and religion, a number of unrelated but

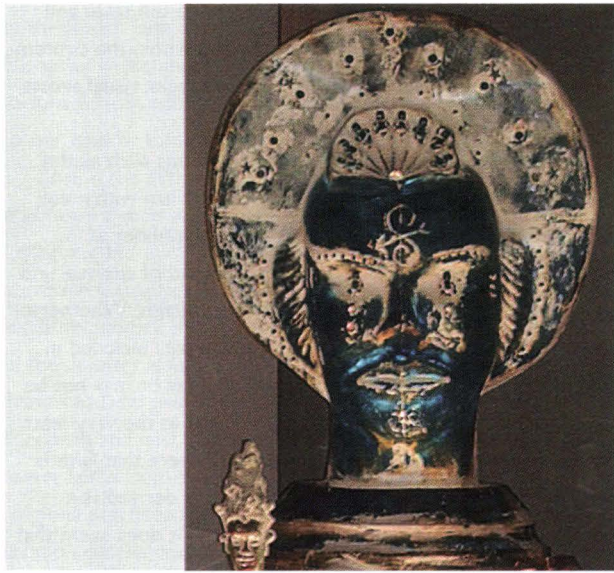
Familiarity and clarity of meaning are...expressed in Mary, Adam & Eve...But, what about Erzulie Dantor

set the stage for this important dialogue to take place.

The collection of works included in this exhibition encourages a lively dialogue – even among the works themselves. Voudun and Orisha deities co-exist with saints and other biblical figures. Spirits, embodied in highly polished white marble shoes and in tree-inspired sculpture, speak both of death and immortality. Culturally specific practices and traditions with long distinguished histories give a nod to more recent 20th century inventions.

Familiarity and clarity of meaning are seen and expressed in traditional imagery closely linked to Christianity – the Virgin Mary, Adam and Eve, saints and other figures representing popular Biblical stories. But, what about Erzulie Dantor; Dambalah, Oshun and Yemoja with roots in Voudun and Santeria and who hold similar positions within these religious traditions?





architectural significance of these sacred spaces but also their aesthetic high points and historic moments.

The colorful worlds of Orisha and Voudun are introduced in a pair of related articles by Kristin Congdon and Tina Bucuvalas. With roots in folk religious traditions these works address the social and celebratory function of these traditions.

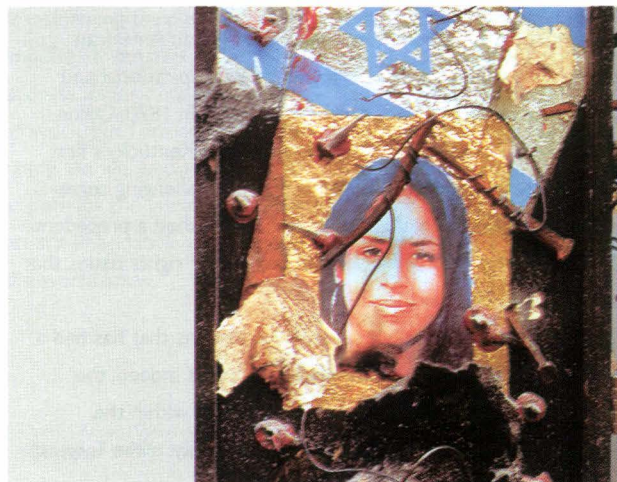
In exploring the aesthetic paths artists have taken to express their spiritual and religious selves, one thing is made clear, at least by the artists in *Thresholds*. That is... the belief in a divine and superhuman power – the manifestations of which are seen in these contemporary expressions of art and spiritual life.

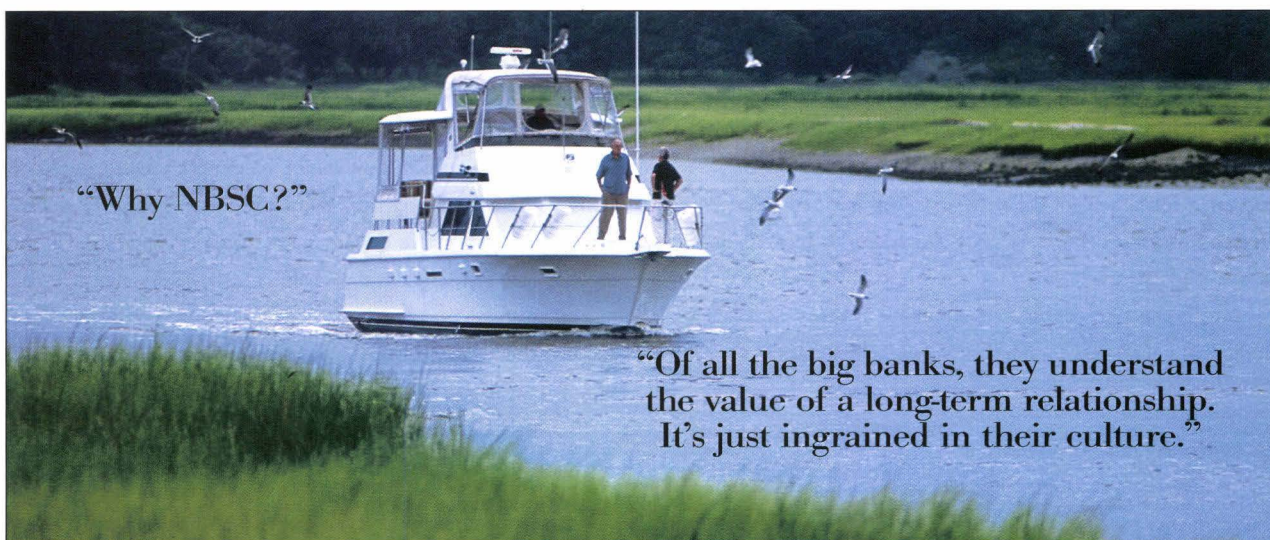
Harriett Green is the visual arts director of the South Carolina Arts Commission

ditional imagery...linked to Christianity—the Virgin Oshun...with roots in Voudun and Santeria?

connected articles are included in this publication to further expand and heighten interest in this ongoing dialogue. In his article, "A Gentle Flame," David Brown describes a community-based project in North Carolina – orchestrated by artist, Lesley Dill. Titled *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy*, this spiritually-oriented multi-tiered project resulted in an exhibition, among other things, of new works inspired by vision statements collected by the artist over a 16 month period.

Lori Kornegay and Nina Bozicnik in *The Devine Conversation: Traditions in Sacred Art* trace the evolution of art in places of worship from architecturally-integrated decorative works to more contemporary expressions of spirituality. The splendor of ecclesiastical architecture in Charleston, South Carolina, is detailed in an essay by Frank Martin who navigates us through the eight edifices participating in the *Thresholds* exhibition – pointing out not only the





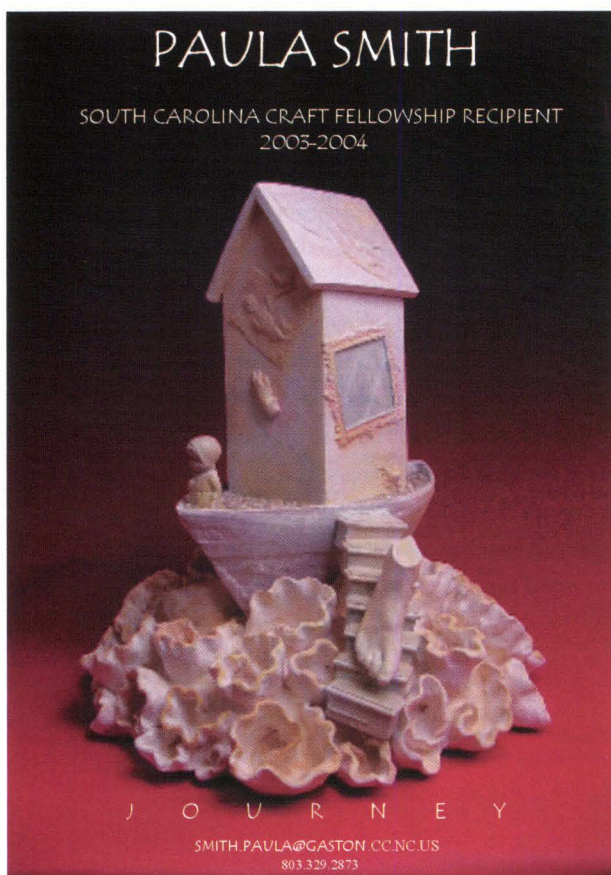
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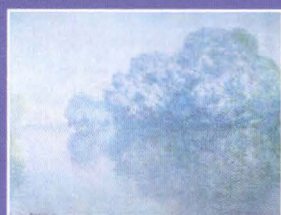
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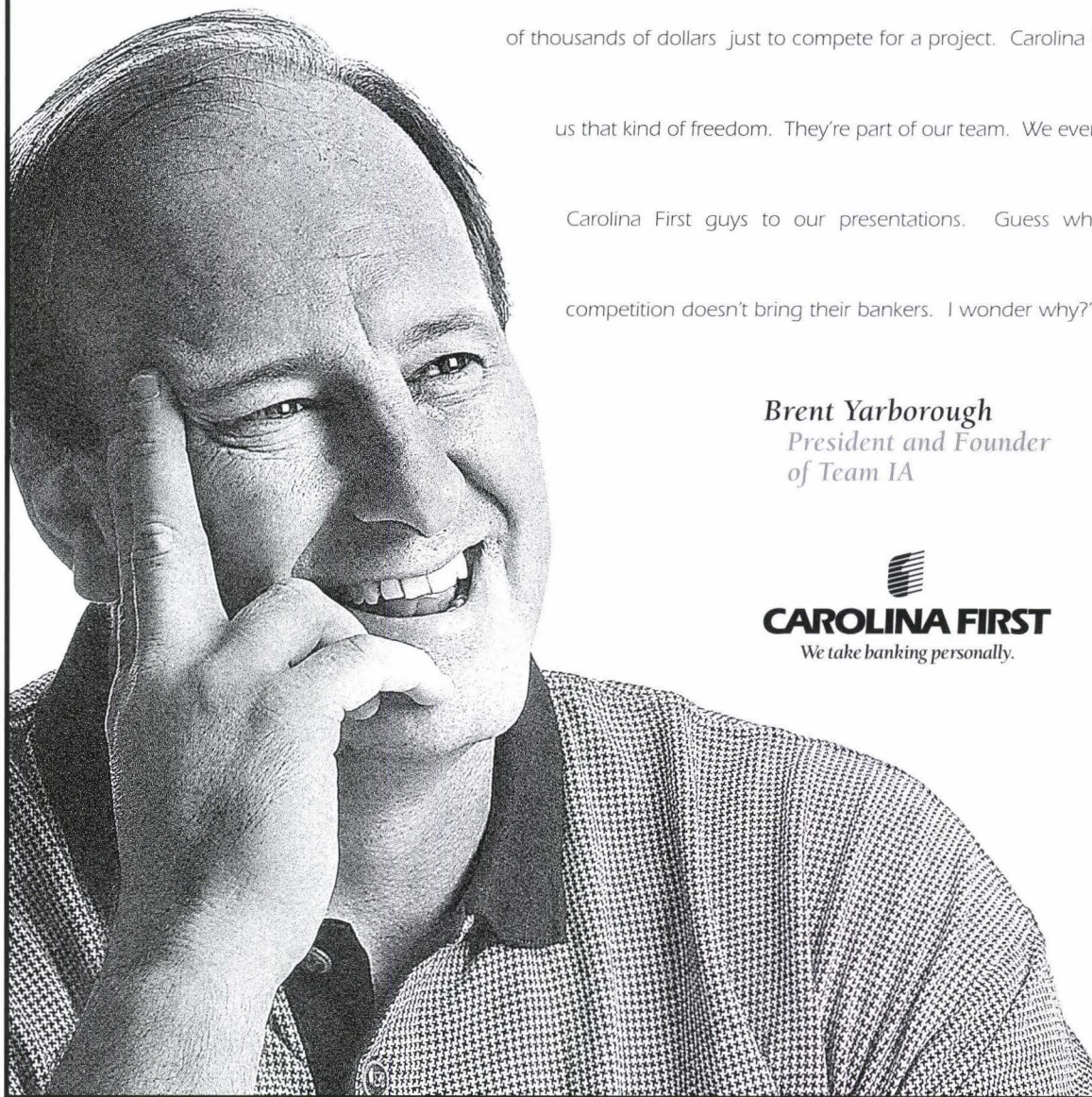
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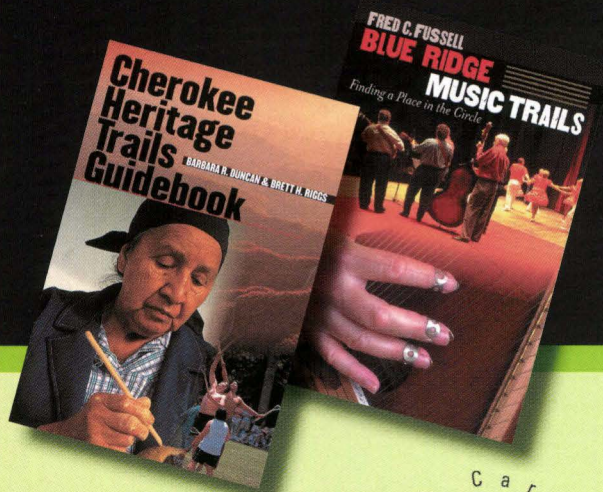
competition doesn't bring their bankers. I wonder why?"

Brent Yarborough
President and Founder
of Team IA

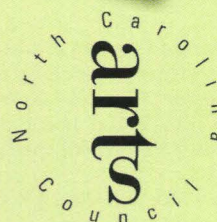

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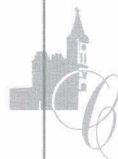
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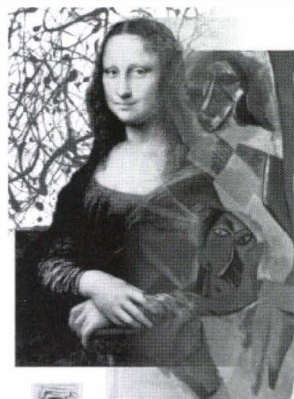
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The City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs welcomes the delegates of the 2003 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.

The City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs celebrates 28 years of helping to make Charleston a wonderful place to live by providing access to the arts to all citizens. The OCA collaborates with Charleston's great artists and arts organizations to produce:

Piccolo Spoleto Festival, May 28-June 13, 2004

Since 1979, the official outreach arm of Spoleto Festival USA

MOJA Arts Festival, September 23-October 3, 2004

Since 1979, a Celebration of African-American and Caribbean Art

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First Night Charleston, December 31, 2004

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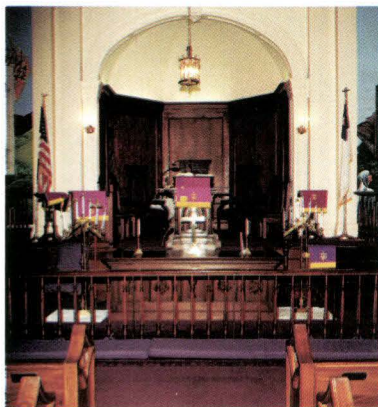
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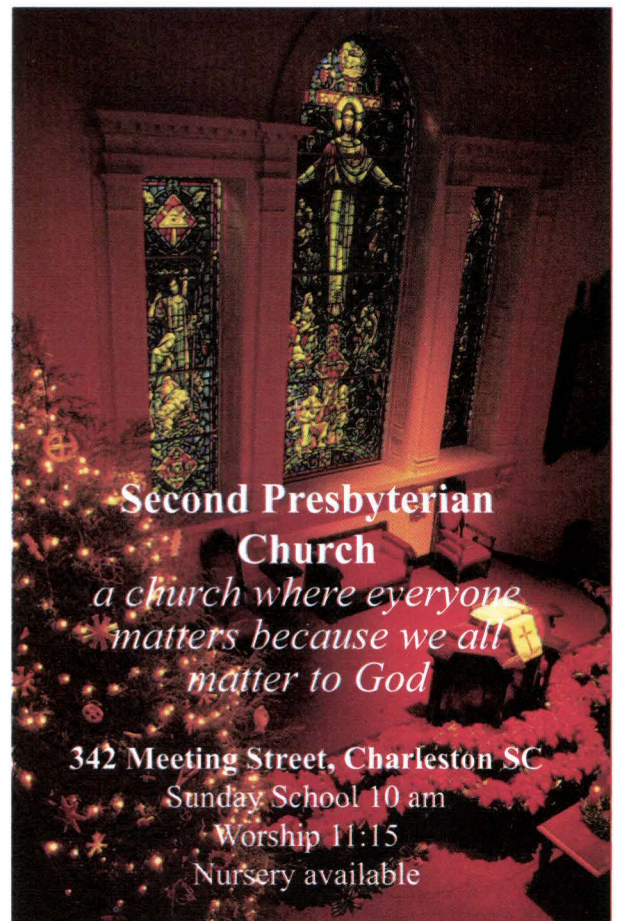
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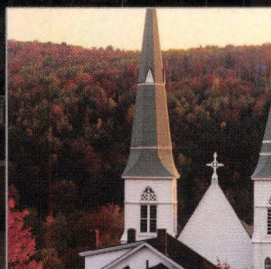
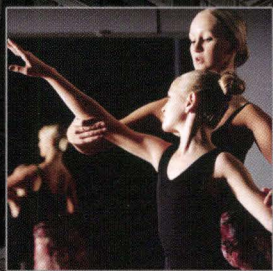
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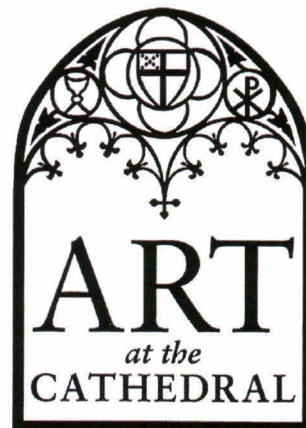
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*The Courtesan on Parade, 1795,
Chobunsai Eishi (Japanese, 1756-1829),
woodblock print on paper, Gibbes
Museum of Art*



*Corene, 1995, Jonathan Green (American,
b. 1955), oil on canvas, Gibbes Museum of
Art*

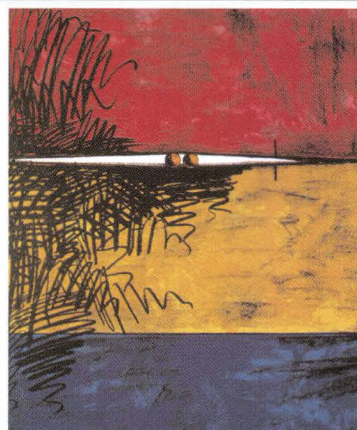


*Bombardment of Fort Sumter, 1886, William Aiken Walker
(American, 1838-1921), oil on canvas, Gibbes Museum of Art*

*Meeting Street, 1925, Alfred
Hutty (American, 1877-1954), oil
on canvas, Gibbes Museum of Art*



*John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), 1838, Rembrandt Peale (American,
1778-1860), oil on canvas, Gibbes Museum of Art*



*Pointing with Two Balls, 58/59, 1971 Jasper Johns
(American, b. 1930), screenprint on paper,
Gibbes Museum of Art*



*Mrs. Mary Sommers Buist Lamb
(d. 1872), 1834, Charles Fraser
(American, 1782-1860), water-
color on ivory, Gibbes Museum of
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ART AND THE SPIRITUAL

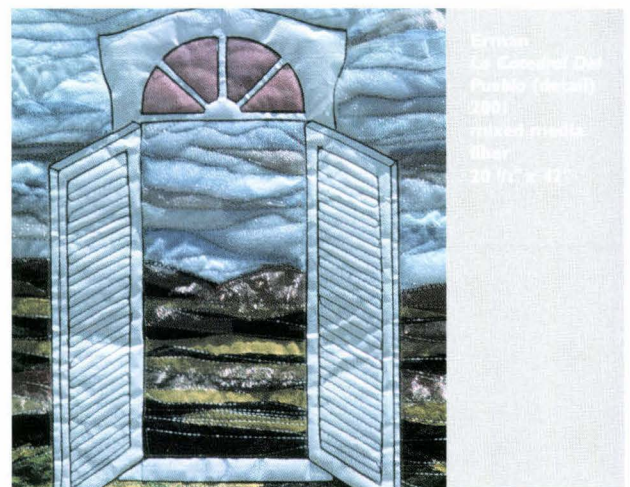
FROM time immemorial similar questions have resonated through otherwise extremely dissimilar cultures. Why are we here? What is the meaning of death? Is there anything beyond the world we see? Do unseen forces guide the actions of mankind and the upheavals of nature? How do we determine what is good and what is evil?

Religion, which has evolved to deal with these questions, takes myriad forms. Ultimately, however, nearly every religion involves making the leap between different modes of consciousness and orders of existence. *Thresholds*, the word which appears in the title of this exhibition, is meant to conjure the picture of a figure poised between two realms. These realms are many. The artists here mediate on the boundaries between heaven and earth (or, in a more pessimistic mood, between heaven and hell), body and soul, matter and spirit, human and divine, living and dead.

In common parlance, we often think of such pairs of words as opposites – irreconcilable states separated by high and often unbridgeable barriers. However, the artists in this exhibition suggest another way of thinking about these matters. They suggest how much of our spiritual life takes place in the overlap between realms.

The artists in this exhibition represent a dizzying variety of religious and spiritual traditions – among them Pentecostalism, Evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, Greek Orthodox, pantheism, Judaism, Santeria, Buddhism, and Vodun. They hail from five Southern states – North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Tennessee and Kentucky. They have their own distinctive histories and set of religious expressions. Their approach to religion ranges from unwavering belief to anxious skepticism. In the range of these artists' relationships to religion and faith, they offer a microcosm of the spiritual diversity of this country.

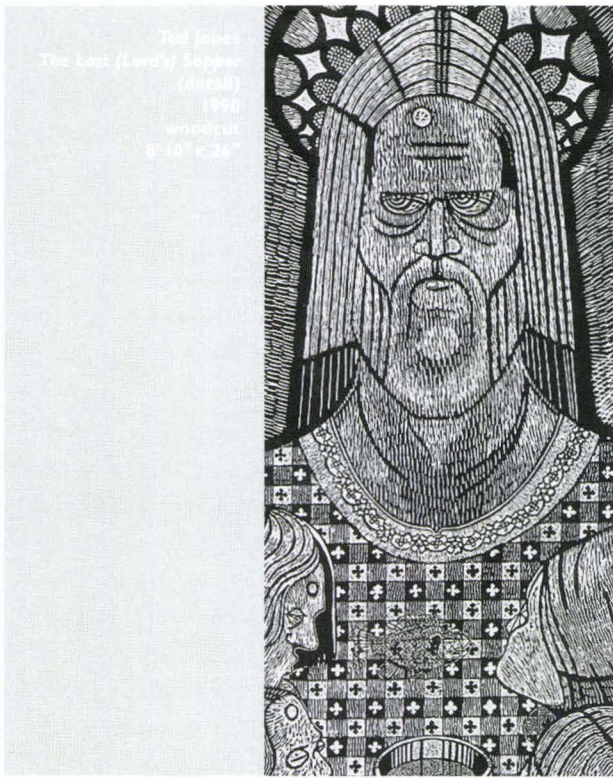
Thus, *Thresholds* is offered in the interests of ecumenism.



This idea seems particularly pressing today, when religion too often seems to be wielded as a divisive force, nationally and internationally. Especially when melded with nationalism, it can become toxic – a pretext for war, a justification for intolerance, an excuse for denying the beliefs, lifestyles, and even the essential humanity of others. Religion can also be a healing force when embraced in the spirit of love and mutual understanding. That is the hope, which is embedded in this exhibition.

The idea of addressing religious diversity through contemporary art may seem counter-intuitive. There has long been a perceived animosity between the visual arts, particularly of the avant-garde variety, and religion. In the 1940s, the high priest of modernism, critic Clement Greenberg, decreed references to religion, politics or literature as impurities from which advanced art needed to be purged. In 1978, critic Rosalind Krauss noted that art and religion seemed to have reached a state of "absolute rupture."

As the work in this exhibition demonstrates, such avowals of enmity are deeply misplaced. We have only to go back to



pre-20th century art history, or to the traditions of non-western art, to see how powerfully religion has influenced art. In fact, in many places, this tradition of interdependence never ended. That is especially evident in the craft tradition, well represented in *Thresholds*, and in the increasingly respected field of "outsider art" whose practitioners' lack of formal training is more than made up for by the urgency of their spiritual concerns. Meanwhile, even within the so-called mainstream art world, artists have become increasingly willing to expose their religious roots and to explore the meaning of faith in their art.

Thresholds casts a wide net. In some cases, artists are working out of specific religious traditions. Eileen Brautman recreates versions of Ketubot – Jewish Marriage contracts – handcutting the paper on which they are written to create delicate frames dancing with floral, animal and architectural forms, which make reference to Jewish life and ritual. Elias Damianakis works in the Greek Orthodox tradition. He creates icons, representations of saints and the holy family, whose essential style has been fixed for centuries. Within the Orthodox tradition, these images are not mere representations, but are actual carriers of divine power.

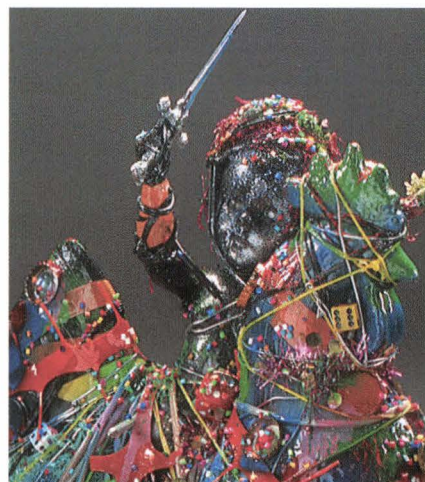
The exhibition also acknowledges the new religious forms, which emerged from the melding of African and Christian religions. One of these is Santería, which is based primarily on Yoruba religious practices brought to Cuba by West Africans. In a fusion of traditions, Spanish saints or "santos" merged with Yoruban "orishas" to create a complex hierarchy of deities. Cuban born Eusebio Escobar carries on this

tradition through the creation of altars and ritual garments for the worship of the orishas.

Similarly, Robert Morgan invokes Vodun, another such melding of Christian and African religion. In his work bits of junk and found objects are pieced together to become shrines and embodiments of spirits and deities. Such spirits reappear in the work of Edouard Duval-Carrie, in whose hands they are adapted to deal with both the artist's personal history and the political situation in his native Haiti.

While such works refer to practices far beyond the region, other artists deal with more specifically southern traditions. Terri Dowell-Dennis is deeply interested in the lore and values of Appalachian culture. Her *Sunday School Lesson* deals with the ambiguous messages conveyed to girls about the virtues and vices in that version of the Christian tradition, while *Corn Goddess* refers to the Appalachian "corn dolly" which carries a whiff of ancient harvest and fertility myths. Robert Trotman's *Poor Paul*, a beautifully crafted wooden figure of a man lying on the ground with arms extended, draws on Caravaggio's great painting of St. Paul knocked off his horse on the road to Damascus. Portrayed in modern dress, the work suggests the overwhelming force of religious conversion as it is experienced among evangelical Christians.

Gary Monroe, deals with the ecstatic element of Pentecostalism in large drawings whose compositions are based on traditional masterpieces of religious art. However, they have been updated and transformed to reflect the ritual of snake handling which is, along with speaking in tongues, laying of hands on the sick and exorcism, an important spiritual practice in certain Appalachian Pentecostal churches. Snake handling is seen as a test of faith and in Monroe's drawings, the practice is overlaid with echoes of other biblical references to serpents. Another version of this theme appears in the work of Matthew Stacy. Drawing on the altarpiece format, Stacy's small painted wooden constructions whose doors swing open reveal alternate scenes of



Robert Morgan
St. Martha and the
Chicken (detail)
2003
mixed media
13" x 13" x 18"

worshippers in the woods grappling with snakes or seeking the spring of truth with a dowsers fork.

Lavon Van Williams' wood sculpture expresses the exuberant spirituality of southern churchgoers. Shallow carved reliefs and freestanding figures show them singing, rejoicing and rising to testify to their faith in the Lord. Meanwhile, Susan Harbage Page pays homage to the unquestioning faith of evangelical Christian women. She invited a



cross section of women who study or work at Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina to sit for a dual portrait – one portraying their faces in conventional portrait mode and the other of an object of sacred significance. Not surprisingly, many selected their Bibles, which are clasped in sheltering hands.

Many of the artists draw on the traditional religious iconography of Western art, updating depictions of saints or biblical stories in ways that reflect their persistent presence in the contemporary imagination. Gaela Erwin's paintings of saints are actually self-portraits. She focuses on virgin martyrs and holy penitents, mimicking the traditional addition of a predella, or small panel, painted with a body part or relic with which the faithful could identify the depicted figure. Body parts like the heart, uterus and fetus raise questions about the mixed messages about sexuality and gender conveyed by the Church. Thomas Thoun takes a more light-hearted approach to the moral meanings conveyed by the lives of the Saints. In *Cut from the Same Cloth*, he pairs a saint (St. Francis) with figure (Cinderella) from popular fairy tales, suggesting that both kinds of stories become our moral guideposts in childhood.

Diane Kahlo reworks traditional images of Adam and Eve or the Virgin Mary, encasing them in cages or behind tendrils of vines. The effect is to both protect and imprison them, highlighting the vulnerability of faith in the modern world. Adam and Eve reappear in the surrealist sculpture of Herb Parker who morphs them into a kind of holy family, as the

two human protagonists and the snake assume the faces of the artist, his wife and daughter.

In Aaron Lee Benson's work, Bible stories and figures are transformed into pulsating clay towers in which human and natural forms mingle and merge. Set upright, they suggest the upward movement of faith as it transforms and uplifts even a sinner like Mary Magdalene. Ted Jones uses the woodblock medium to re-imagine the stories of Jonah and the Last Supper. His depiction of the *Horsemen of the Apocalypse* transforms these harbingers of End Times into striking images confronting us head on.

The dramatic and awe inspiring imagery of the "Book of Revelations" has inspired artists throughout the history of western art, among them Michelangelo, Signorelli and Bosch. Revelations is a fevered account of the cosmic warfare and supernatural disasters, which will accompany the Last Days before the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time.

Artists in this exhibition explore various aspects of this theme. In his jagged, expressionist paintings, Kurt Zimmerman takes on the entire scope of earthly time, revealing the chaos that accompanies the beginning and the end of the world. Alex Clark's paintings of the disasters, which will occur in the last days – the passage of the exterminating angel and the flames that will engulf the earth – have a stiller, almost frozen quality that heightens their sense of dread. There is hope, however, as his representation of the asphodel fields present an ancient Greek idea of heaven. William Thomas Thompson brings out the terror of the expected apocalypse with frenzied brushwork that describes fearsome devils and beasts unleashed upon the world.

Ronald Cooper brings the message closer to home with painted wooden boxes that contrast the serenity of the lives of the faithful with the torments perpetrated on the fallen by gleeful devils. The devil reappears on Peter Lenzo's face jars. Following an old southern tradition, he crafts ceramic vessels bearing the visage, sometimes doubled and weirdly distorted, of Satan. However, they are also self-portraits of a sort, suggesting that the devil is not so much the incarnation of evil as a metaphor for the conflicting forces, which inhabit us all.

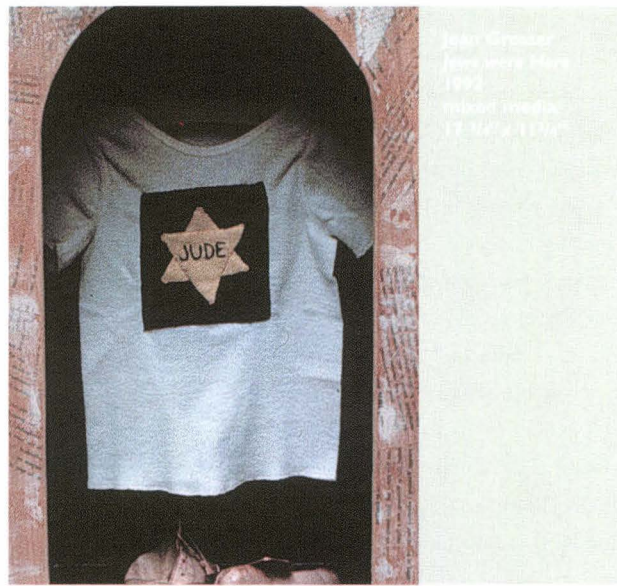
More benign spirits appear in the work of other artists. Christine "Chiwa" Clark creates serene earthenware figures who draw their hands together to extend an offering to the forces of earth and sky. Cheryl Bogdanowitsch makes the notion of nature spirits even more explicit in her ceramic and wood sculptures. These works incorporate real logs and branches to form striking personages that exist between nature and humanity. In a similar spirit, Christine Federighi is inspired by the animist philosophy of the American Indians. Her ceramic figures, covered with references to plant forms, water and landscapes give life to the elements of nature.

The notion of spirits among us is also a feature of **Janet Kozachek's** mosaic masks. Derived from the Mayan spirit masks created to ease the dead person's passage into the other world, they exist on the thresholds between two realities. **Michelle Van Parys** expresses the duality of life in beautifully layered photographic images which incorporate 19th century popular prints dealing with femininity, mourning and domesticity. Printed in the negative, superimposed over each other and often overlaid with scratches and markings, they suggest a shifting invisible world in which spirits of the past and present commune together.

The inseparability of life and death preoccupies other artists, reminding us that an exploration of the understanding of death is one of religion's great themes. The artists here are less concerned with the conditions of the afterlife than with the meaning of death for those left behind. Following in the tradition of the anatomical works of Rembrandt and Da Vinci, **Deanna Leamon** makes unflinchingly realistic drawings from cadavers. She imbues the body with dignity and even grandeur, reminding us, as she notes, that "the body is the seat of the soul." **David Voros** also draws on art history. The paintings in his "Dance of Death" series recall medieval depictions of the danse macabre, which served as a reminder that death comes to all. Like his predecessors, he represents the figure of death, realized as a sinister clown, cajoling the living into a ghoulish dance to their mortality.

Cuban born **Demi** is haunted by the ghosts of her past. When she was a young girl, her father was executed for political reasons and she was separated from the rest of her family and sent to America. Her lyrical, allegorical paintings meld images born of dream and memory and speak of her childhood sense of loss and desolation.

Loss is at the heart of other works as well. In *Expectation*, **Daud Akhriev**, a native of the Northern Caucasia who learned his craft in the Soviet Union, memorializes the death of his father in a haunting tableau of a man and woman sitting with quiet attention at a table. The triangular cloth lying between



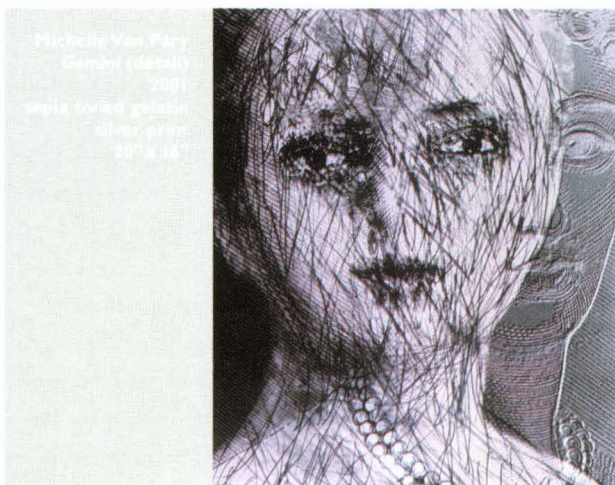
them is a Byzantine symbol of absence while the vessel resting on it is a Chechen motif associated with death.

Michael Mallard's *Warring Unbelief* pays homage to his father – a pastor and former army chaplain. The embrace at the center of the work derives from the artist's interaction with his father on the last day of his life. The hopeful words inscribed on the work come from the sermon his father delivered on the day that he informed his congregation that he was suffering from terminal cancer.

Another kind of loss is depicted in **Ben Mansur's** *Angel Takes the Lead: She's a Beautiful Horse*. Based on a personal experience, it depicts a man handing his horse to an angel (in real life a veterinarian), not realizing he will never see the horse again.

In a related approach, several artists have created shrines and memorials that remember and celebrate individuals and peoples past and present. **David Finn's** *Ghosts* are beautifully carved white marble shoes from the 19th century. Created in materials and finished in the manner of funerary monuments or cemetery markers, these empty shoes speak of absence, loss and nostalgia. **Jim Jipson** also plays with the memorial tradition in his *Chamber Series*, an arrangement of small, individually illuminated assemblages which incorporate evocative objects and photographs that speak of forgotten and unknown lives.

Other shrines are more specific in their references. **Jean Grosser's** work generally deals with situations of political conflict and oppression around the world. Grosser focuses on the catastrophe of the Holocaust and the tragedy unfolding today in Israel and the Occupied territories which makes martyrs of both suicide bombers and their victims. **André Leon Gray** deals with the similar destructiveness of slavery and its aftermath. His use of recycled objects evokes the hidden history of African Americans in this country and



commemorates the continuing difficulties of their lives.

Maritza Davila honors her parents – her Spanish mother and Haitian father – in a pair of shrine-like prints that mingle their images with objects and symbols that reflect their histories and their ways of life.

The coffin and the grave are among the most familiar symbols of death. **Linda McCune's** narrow ornamented box conjures both the coffin and the reliquary – those sacred boxes, which held relics of the deceased. In her reinvention of this receptacle, McCune fills the box with book pages recalling the actions of the person who has departed.

Loren Schwerd finds inspiration in the crumbling, cradle shaped grave markers found in the cemeteries of Charleston, South Carolina. She has created one of these in cast iron and filled it with bottles of water which equal in quantity the amount of water in the adult human body. Thus, they reference the absent human body, which has disappeared

Pradip Malde uses the ability of photography to layer and distill images of ordinary objects like tea leaves; wool or a doll's torso, photographing them through sheets of glass or acetate so that they are transformed into nearly abstract traces. His series of photographs present an effort to give visual form to ineffable states of consciousness, among them the discovery and loss of self, and the experiences of birth and death. These are moments, the artist suggests, when we are filled with a simultaneous perception of presence and absence.

For **Joyce Gralak**, who was born Catholic but has evolved her own spiritual understanding, God is a universal energy. Her paintings exploit the qualities of wax, which is at once material and translucent to create layered compositions that suggest a reality in which all things are ultimately connected. **Leo Twiggs** also employs wax to create batik paintings, which relate in both medium and imagery to African American tradi-

they suggest how much of our spiritual life takes place in the overlap between realms.

beneath the grass sprouting up within the weatherworn graves.

Finally, in a further twist on the memorial theme, is **Michael Aurbach's** *Witness: Conspiracy* series. His metallic sculptures reference the architecture of church tombs, banks and the apparatus of surveillance. One senses that something secret, even sacred, is hidden inside, though it is not clear if it is the religion of the spirit or of commerce which is being commemorated.

Thresholds also includes a number of artists whose spirituality is more personal. Derived from nature, their sense of universal energy or their feeling of connection to the cosmos, their work often involves a borrowing and melding of different religious traditions. **Christine Kuhn** draws on Tantric and Tibetan Buddhism to create talismen – objects incorporating natural and art materials – which are believed to be endowed with the power to influence events.

Cuban born **Erman** use images borrowed from both Catholicism and Santeria to suggest states of passage in his quilted fiber pieces. *La Catedral Del Pueblo* (The People's Church) represents a place of rest for troubled spirits, while *El Trono Vacio* (The Empty Throne) honors the artist's ailing grandmother – the family matriarch – now awaiting her journey to the next world.

tions of art and spirituality. His work suggests the coexistence of the realm of everyday life and spirit, as figures contemplate visions of a world beyond this one.

Arturo Sandoval collapses both time and space in his *Trinity* series in which he uses high tech reflective materials like holographic Mylar, metallic foil and monofilament in combination with more traditional materials like gesso and paint. His work draws on a cosmic consciousness and his triangular pieces suggest the notion of infinity and spiritual perfection.

Light also operates as metaphorically as a sign of spirit and cosmos in the works of **Jim Hirschfield** and **Sonya Ishii**. They construct site specific installations in which projected light and shadows create spaces for meditation and contemplation.

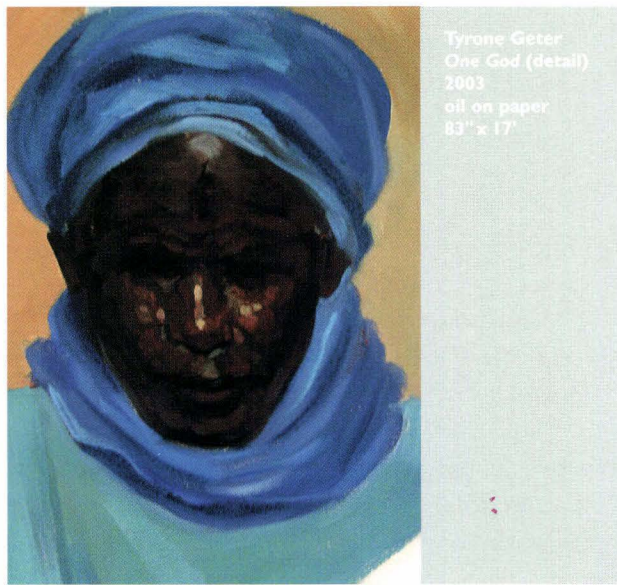
For several artists, nature serves as a visible manifestation of divine energy. In this, they echo the works of the Hudson River School painters for whom the pristine American landscape provided evidence of "God's fingerprint" on earth. **Robert Johnson** professes himself a pantheist for whom nature is the source of deep spiritual communion. His intricate, lyrical paintings draw on artistic traditions, ranging from Indian miniatures to medieval paintings to Balinese and Tibetan art – all of which creates a sense of God and nature.

Mary Craik employs the changing of the seasons as a metaphor for the cycle of life and the inseparability of life and death. In her fiber work – *The Tree of Life* – she marks the transition from the abundance of summer to the aridity of winter to the rebirth of spring as they transform the branches of a single tree.

Bryant Holsenbeck draws on the Tantric Buddhist tradition of the mandala, which traditionally are sand paintings created by Tibetan monks and designed to be destroyed after a brief life. The geometric patterns contained in Buddhist mandalas present esoteric charts of the universe. Holsenbeck echoes these shapes, but she has a more immediate message in mind. Created from thousands of colorful metal and plastic bottlecaps and usually orchestrated by Holsenbeck as a community-based project, her work is an argument for recycling and respect for the environment.

An even more critical view of our failure to be stewards of nature appears in works from Kathleen Campbell's *Modern Theology or a Universe of Our Own*. Updating the stained glass tradition with the use of electronically illuminated light boxes, she presents ironically conceived saints and angels who preside over a technological society, which has lost its connection both to nature and God.

Finally, Tyrone Geter crosses the boundaries that seem



Tyrone Geter
One God (detail)
2003
oil on paper
83" x 17"

to separate one religion from another in a pair of works, which affirm our common values, and sense of humanity. *One God*, a nine section painting in the form of an altarpiece, serves as a reminder of the spirituality shared by believers in the world's great religions. *God is Watching* takes the other side of the issue, pointing out the tragic results when differences in religious beliefs become the justification for war and conflict.

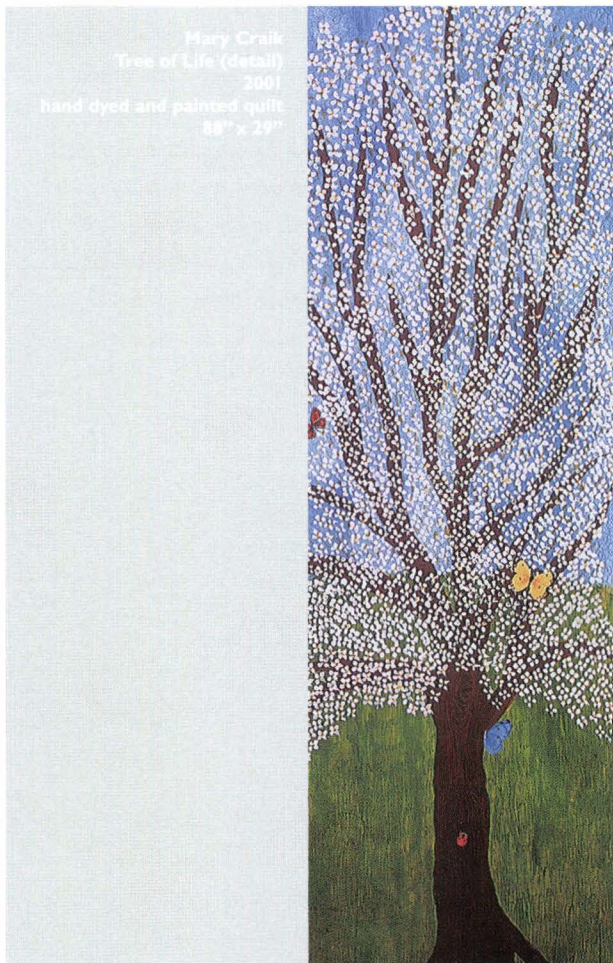
Geter's celebration of the universality of the spiritual impulse and his plea for religious tolerance and understanding are the two poles around which this exhibition has been organized.

The artists, representing five Southern states, make the case for the strength of regional identity while serving as a microcosm for the remarkable ethnic, racial and religious diversity of the United States. In this, they remind us that an embrace of all varieties of religious expression is one of the building blocks from which our nation has been constructed.

In his monumental study of the young United States, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that America's devotion to religion was inseparable from its devotion to equality and democracy. Today, over 150 years later, *Thresholds* is offered in the hopes that this can still be true.

Eleanor Heartney
Curator

Eleanor Heartney is a nationally recognized independent cultural critic and curator from New York. Her next book, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art*, will be published in February 2004 by Midmarch Arts Press.



Mary Craik
Tree of Life (detail)
2001
hand dyed and painted quilt
88" x 29"

Curator's Statement

ELEANOR Heartney is a nationally-recognized independent cultural critic and curator from New York. Her writings and curatorial work have focused on national and international issues in contemporary art. A contributing editor for *Art in America* and *Artpress*, Heartney has also written articles and reviews for *ArtNews*, *New Art Examiner*, *Washington Post*, *Sculpture*, *Contemporaria* and *The New York Times*. A former visiting critic with the Rhode Island School of Design, Maryland Institute, Northwestern University, Cornell and Tyler School of Art, among others, she has received the College Art Association's Frank Jewett Mather Award for Art Criticism. Heartney is the author of a collection of essays, *Critical Condition: American Culture at the Crossroads* (1997, Cambridge University Press); and *Postmodernism* (2001, Tate Gallery Publishers and Cambridge University Press). Her next book, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art*, will be published in February by Midmarch Arts Press.

Eleanor Heartney

Questions of the meaning of religious faith and its place in public life are critical now. They manifest themselves equally in the international arena, where extremist versions of religion fuel war and civil conflict, and within the United States where questions of the proper relationship of Church and State are constantly being revisited. They are also posed

by the broad and ever increasing embrace of both organized and personal forms of religion by the American public and by the reemergence of the rhetoric of good and evil.

De Tocqueville argued that America's devotion to religion was inseparable from its devotion to equality and democracy. Today, these relationships have become infinitely more complex than they were during his 1835 visit to the still youthful United States.

I have been conducting a study of the place of religion in contemporary art. There is a long standing assumption that art and religion, or at least avant garde art and traditional religion, are natural antagonists. Countering this assumption is the long history of mutual influence between the aesthetic and spiritual realms. In recent years, as we have moved further and further from the rigid iconoclasm of the mid 20th century avant garde, this influence has manifested itself in a growing number of artists who draw on their religious backgrounds or spiritual inclinations as a subject matter for art. I propose to curate an exhibition, which would examine this tendency.

Artists selected for the show will be those who explore the many borders inherent in religious belief and practice, among them the borders between life and death, body and soul, matter and spirit, past and present, public and private. This exhibition will provide a mirror of the multiplicity of spiritual and religious experiences. It will also offer a forum for discussing the larger social, political and personal issues raised by religion in contemporary culture.



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Daud Akhriev	Robert Johnson
Michael Aurbach	Ted Jones
Aaron Lee Benson	Diane Kahlo
Cheryl Bogdanowitsch	Janet Kozachek
Eileen Brautman	Christine Kuhn
Kathleen Campbell	Deanna Leamon
Alexander Clark	Peter Lenzo
Christine Clark (Chiwa)	Pradip Malde
Ronald Cooper	Michael Mallard
Mary Craik	Ben Mansur
Elias Damianakis	Linda McCune
Maritza Dávila	Gary Monroe
Demi	Robert Morgan
Terri Dowell-Dennis	Susan Harbage Page
Edouard Duval-Carrié	Herb Parker
Gaela Erwin	Arturo Alonzo Sandoval
Eusebio Escobar	Loren Schwerd
Christine Federighi	Matthew Stacy
David Finn	William Thomas Thompson
Tyrone Geter	Thomas Thouné
Juan González (Erman)	Robert Trotman
Joyce Gralak	Leo Twiggs
André Leon Gray	Michelle Van Parys
Jean Grosser	Lavon Van Williams
Jim Hirschfield/Sonya Ishii	David Voros
Bryant Holsenbeck	Kurt Zimmerman
James Jipson	

Expectation was painted in memory of my father. In the tradition of my native land (Kazakhstan, former USSR), after a death of a loved one water is put out for the departing soul to drink after the exhaustion of separation from this earth and the loved ones on it. Because of the seriousness of the subject, I tried to eliminate all the 'beautiful' effects of the paint surface, itself, and used the most simple form of the triangle which has three points, – one for each of the living family members and one for the departing member. Then, I united them all using the light coming from above. I wanted

to show the loneliness of parting with a beloved person and the yearning for the departed. I depict mourners using the traditional spiritual rituals to cope with their grief. The arts, without spirituality, are only decoration. We experience spiritual events in our life, but they are fleeting and cannot be seen. We have profound emotions, but likewise, they are invisible and often pass quickly. Artists struggle to create a visual essence of spiritual truth, through the desire to have time to contemplate and share the joy.



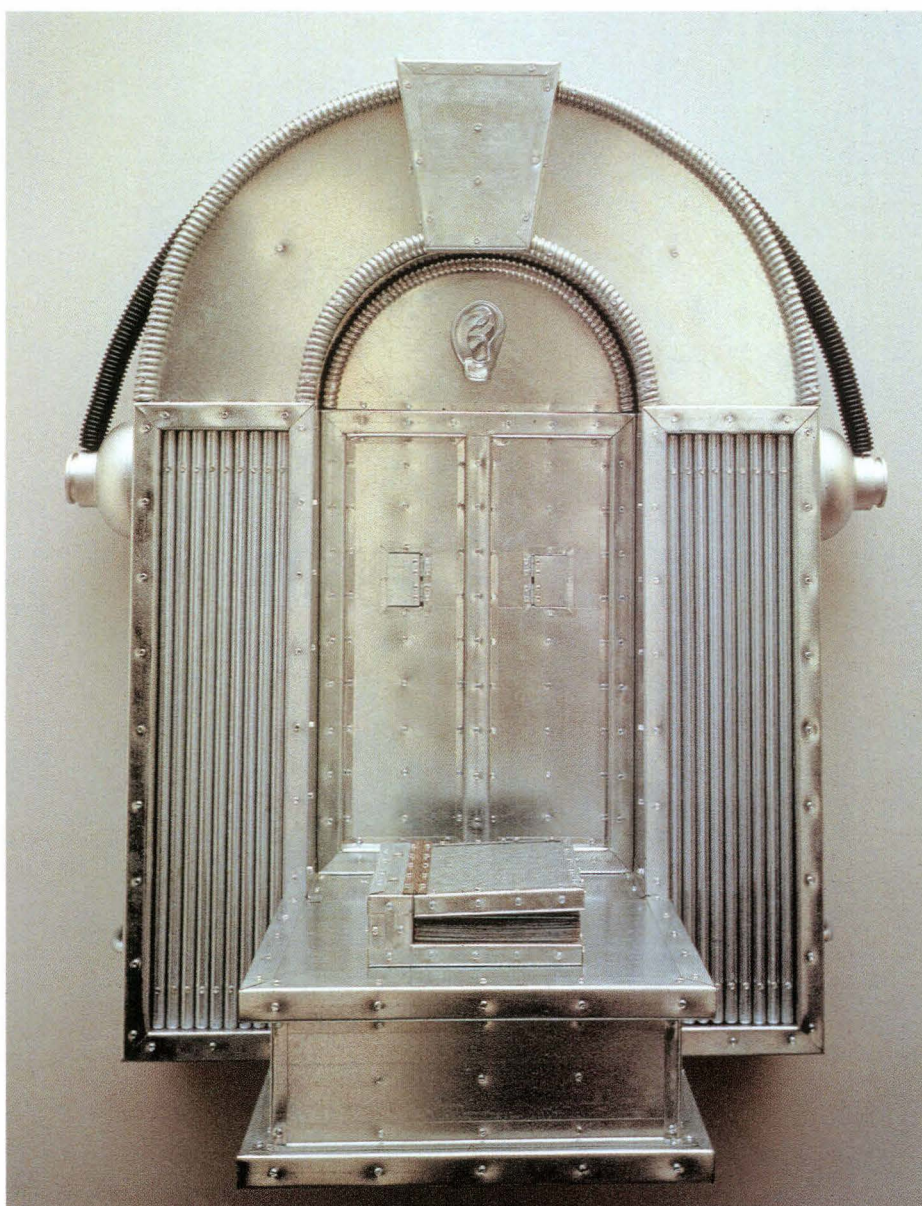
Expectation

1991

oil on linen
37" x 43"

Witness: Conspiracy No. 1 and *Witness: Conspiracy No. 2* have very special functions. These containers serve as repositories for documentation that was gathered legally but in a clandestine manner. If the information inside was released, lives would be altered. Perhaps one should think of each

container as part reliquary casket and part Pandora's Box. While the behind the scenes effort to gather information was legal, it represented a serious departure from what I believe to be ethical behavior.



**Witness:
Conspiracy
No. 1**
1998
mixed media
50" x 44" x 25"

In my latest body of work, I have returned to an exploration of the aesthetic power of pure form reminiscent of much of my work from the late 1980s and early 1990s. The highly textured and organic forms find its origins in nature. These

forms have a strong natural quality that echoes many of the landscapes I encounter while hiking and climbing in the mountainous regions of the world including the upper mid-western United States and the Alps of western and central Europe.



**Lazarus and
the Rich Man**
2002
clay
9' x 48" x 16"

These works have evolved from my study of metaphysics, mediumship, meditation and my love of the natural world. Each piece begins with a unique log or branch, which seems to suggest the type of spirit into which it will evolve. I added ceramic faces to the wood – creating a combination of both spirit and matter.



We Too
2002
wood, ceramic
& oil
58" x 33" x 26"

Designing and writing Ketubot, Jewish Marriage Contracts, allows me to combine my art with my strong connection to the Judaic spirit and devout practices of my ancestors. Passing this spirit from generation to generation is one Mitzvah, commandment, that I fulfill with each Ketubah. About 25 years ago, a Renaissance began for the Ketubah. The Sephardic tradition of decorating it became popular among many Jewish populations. Finally, a Jewish document that I, a woman, could write; a text that was not sacred and forbidden to me. I immediately began studying

Hebrew calligraphy.

Each Ketubah unites a bride and groom to each other and its owners to the history of our people. The words are a contract in which the groom promises to care for his wife, 'as is the way of Jewish husbands.' It provides the wife the rights of ownership and inheritance. Even now, thousands of years since the Bible and the first Ketubah were written, many women wish for these rights. Positive/negative designs created by papercutting can be as delicate as lace or as bold as graphics. My purpose is for these ketubot to delight the bride and groom on their wedding day.



Ketubah of
Seth &
Sharon Leslie

1999

cut paper & inks

31"x 22"

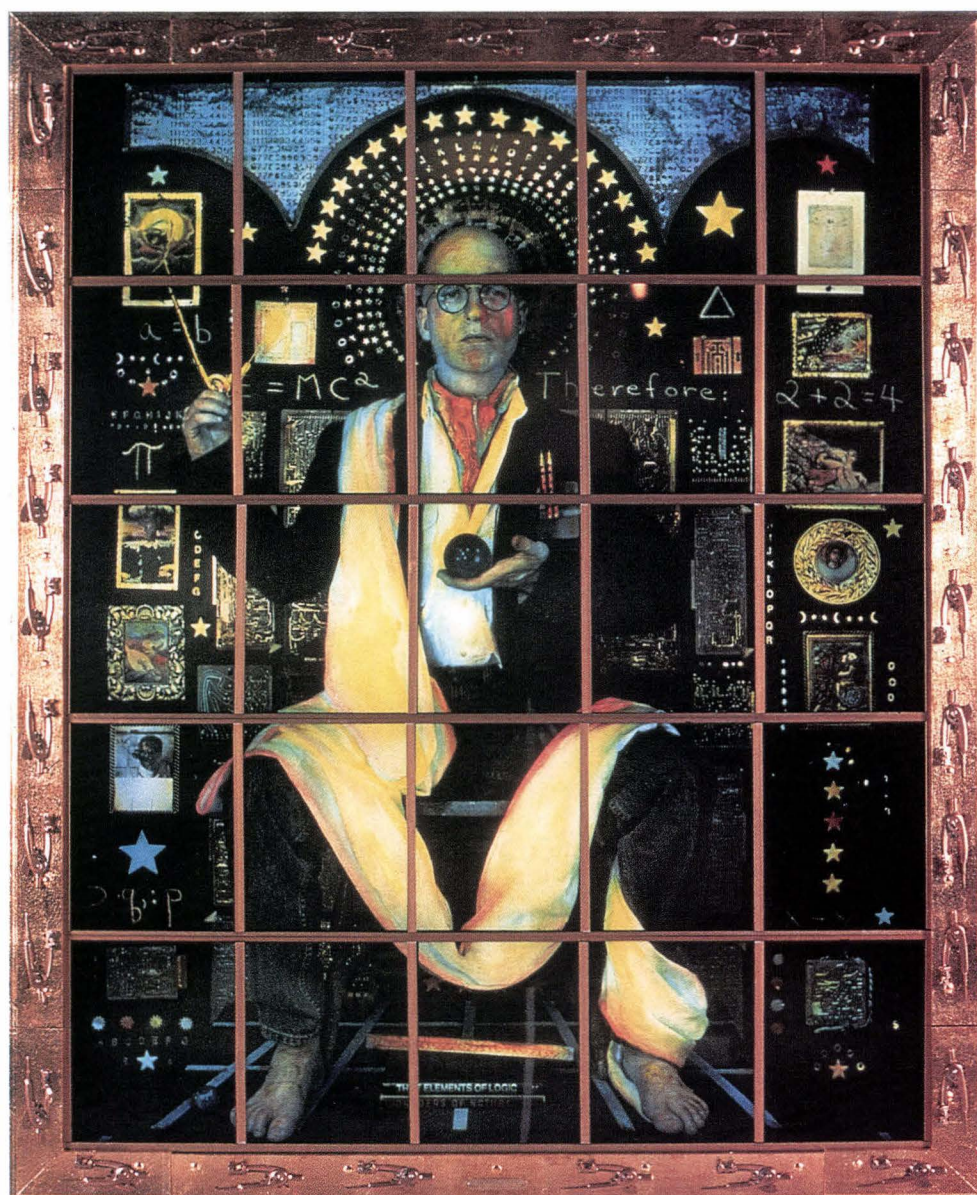
Courtesy of

Seth and Sharon Leslie

Rene Descartes once said that, through science and reason, "we will become the masters and possessors of Nature." This hubris, passed down to us from the early modern age, pervades contemporary life, from capitalist disdain for the ecosystem to the destructive effects of technological weaponry to the increasing attempts by biotechnology to allow us to play God. The two "stained glass windows" shown here are part of a larger installation, consisting of a "chapel" dedicated tongue-in-cheek to our worship of rationalistic values at the expense of humanistic and spiritual ones.

The room depicts an artificial universe of the sort western "Man" could presumably create; yet its construction suggests the limits of human abilities as well as the destructive effects of our rationalized treatment of Nature.

In the original installation there were four elements: Earth, Water, Fire and Air. The first two refer to pollution, the latter to destruction (war and violence). The fifth window, depicts the "Rational Being" (Western man) who has gradually usurped the role of the Divine and created the universe in which we now must live



Rational Being
from "Modern
Theology or a
Universe of Our
Own Creation"
2002
wood, ceramic
& oil
58" x 33" x 26"

My subjects come from history, mythology, religious beliefs, and physical reality – anything I feel still has significance for the modern viewer. An ancient folktale may remain meaningful – depending on the vitality of its re-telling. Humankind has not changed that much.



**Fire will Burn
Earth and Sky**
2000
acrylic on board
24" x 18"

I work from a longing, from a desire to express the inspiration I feel. I show up at the clay, the pieces emerge. The pieces come from the moment; they come from the seasons, land and life forms surrounding me. Each work comes from hopefulness and trust. When they are done, they tell me who they are and what they are to say. They speak through form, symbol and word. My hope is that they will speak of the

connection of earth and sky through this human form we are so lucky to inhabit. My hope is that the pieces weave the web of understanding between all, from the ever-growing spiral on the potters wheel to the universal symbols that are present in nature – the shape of a leaf, wing of a bird and the potential of seeds.



The Gold Within

2000
smoked-fired
earthenware clay,
gold leaf, beads
& shell
24" x 9" x 8"

In the early 1980s, my legs were crushed in a multi-car accident in Ohio and there was even doubt that I would 'make it.' I survived but was not expected to walk again. My recuperation was slow and painful and I suffered from a deep depression. My children bought me some woodworking tools to occupy my mind and I began making cutouts of animals. Eventually, I started carving wood, incorporating

other materials and transforming existing objects. Mostly, now, I use my art as a way to present my religious beliefs. For me, art has been a healing process that brought me out of my depression and inspires me to work each day. I am a Pentecostal Christian and I think of my art as a way in which I can share my personal beliefs with others.



In Competition

1989

paint & wood
27" x 33" x 13"

courtesy of the
Kentucky Folk Art
Center

Throughout the ages, religion has been both a positive and a negative force in its effect on people. It has brought pain, death, hatred and holy wars as well as solace, joy, comfort and meaning to our lives. The tree of life has been a symbolic image representing spirituality and a positive life force in almost all religions. Trees appear often as an expression of my own spirituality in my artwork.



**Tree of Life
(Four Seasons)**

2001
hand dyed,
painted &
quilted silk
88" x 29"
(each piece)

"Mary Theotokos is the living city of the King and God in which Christ has dwelt and works our salvation. She is the mediation between sublimity of God and the abjection of the flesh and becomes the mother of her maker."

Mother and Child explained by Saint Andrew of Crete

Faith, illustrated by my brushstrokes, exemplifies Orthodox-Christian spirituality. Iconography is an interactive encounter whereby the on-looker and the depicted holy-subject exchange glances, thoughts and pray in communion. My art is a window whereby an individual engages tangibly with the spiritual. Iconography is avant-garde art; setting the artistic,

aesthetic and technical standard for centuries. As a spiritual artist in America, I deeply value our freedom of religious expression. Accordingly, no improper affiliation between iconography and the State exists.

Spirituality and religion are not diametrically opposed in this mystic form. The belief that spiritualism is more progressive than organized religion is indicative of the underpinnings of some "modern" thinkers. Born and raised in America with a spiritual quest, my brushstroke transfigures my traditional art; making it: contemporary, surreal and timeless.

This eternal sublime art encompasses the microcosm of the universality and totality of Christianity. It is not inclined toward religiosity, but by its essence "is" spiritual.

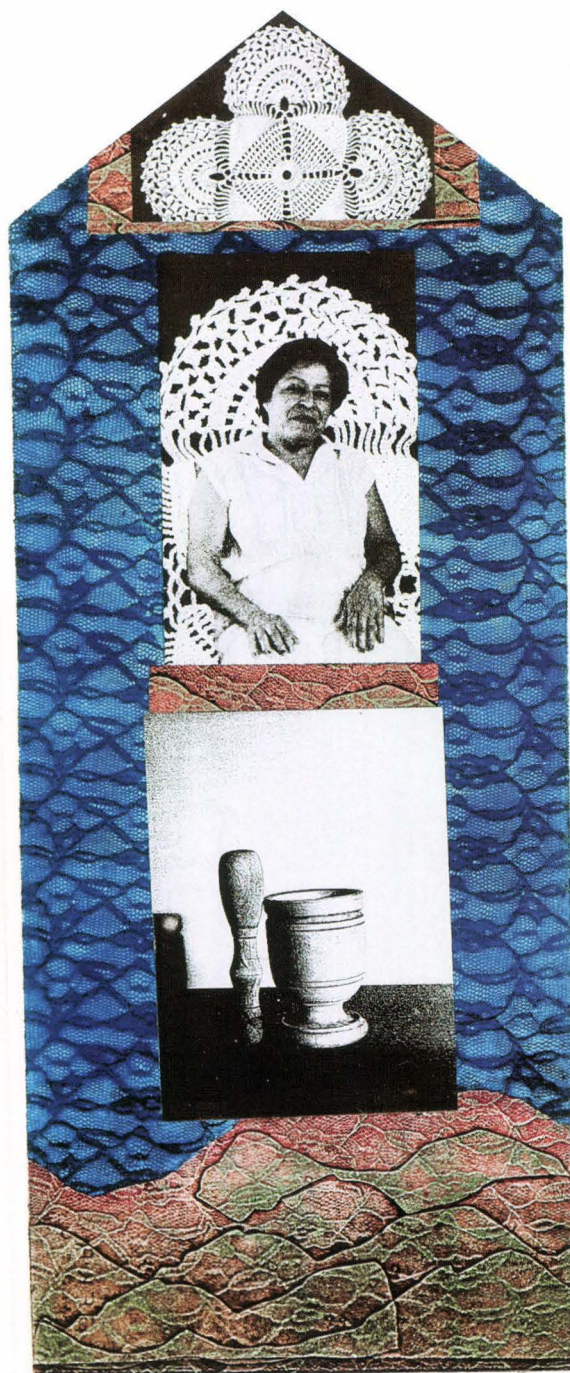


**Mother and
Child**

2002

24 kt. gold leaf &
acrylic on canvas
48" x 48"

The thread that runs through all of my work is ancestry. The view to ancestry is represented by memories that are woven or contemplated through symbols of passage – windows, arches, doorways, and gates. What we see, remember or pass through includes family, culture and religion as well as social, racial and gender issues. My work expresses the dualities that affected me growing up in Puerto Rico. My interracial family was rooted in my mother's Spanish ancestry and my father's African background with roots in Haiti and in the indigenous Taino tribe. The representation of objects found in Doña Lola and Don Moncho, such as the mantilla which alludes to Lola's Roman Catholic and Spanish background; and the kanaga mask of the Dogon of Mali and the bird's feather connect Moncho to both Dogon rituals and Santería.



Doña Lola
2002
collograph &
chine collé
37 1/2" x 15"

I belong to a forgotten group – children of those executed in Cuba for political reasons; sons and daughters still too young of age to understand why we were confronted with death, separation and loneliness. My paintings blossom from the inner depth of those childhood memories.



**El Arturito in
the Island of
Death**

1996

acrylic on canvas
20" x 30"

My recent works are part of an ongoing investigation of Appalachian heritage, lore and values – focusing on the lives of women and the conflation of pagan or nature-based notions with traditional Christian beliefs. Sunday School Lesson reveals the dark side of fundamentalist Christian beliefs. The words Faith, Hope, and Grace are readily apparent on these child-sized 'Bible dresses,' but closer

inspection reveals shadow text – Shame, Guilt, and Fear. The Corn Goddess references a traditional Appalachian folk form – the corn dolly – while also suggesting ancient mythologies revolving around planting, harvesting, the cycle of life and fertility. This work often speaks to the dualities evident in human and divine nature through forms that mimic the Janus figure or the topsy/turvy doll of the American South.



Sunday School Lesson

2000
gold embossed
and hand stamped
leather & wood
30" x 16" x 16"
(each piece)

This installation represents the symbolic marriage of the most prominent Vaudou deities. Erzulie Dantor – the mother, the ultimate genitrix – is seen in union with Dambalah, the serpent, represented here by a river of snakes. He is simply the concept of time (as in the serpent eating its tail) everlasting; circular and cyclical time. With their union life continues. In attendance are a few other deities including Erzulie Freda – the courtesan; the whore – who in time gets consecrated as the goddess of love. These two Erzulies are one and the same but the two differ in the degree of submission and degradation perpetrated in their condition as slaves.

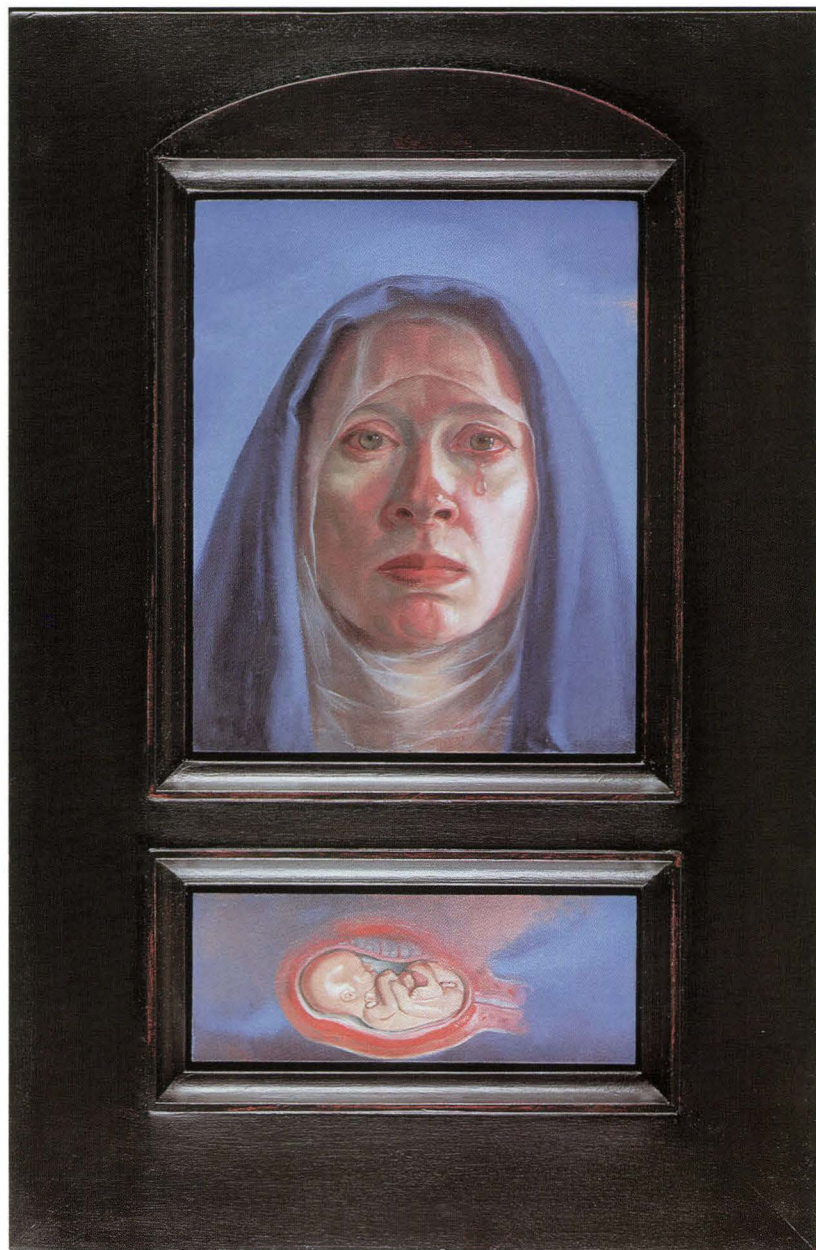
Freda is wily and the perfect seductress whose ultimate goal is to procreate with the masters in order for her child to have a chance to access that nether world of the mulatto who in turn had a better chance (not automatic) of becoming an "affranchi" (i.e.. freed man) in the twisted world of the French colonies. Dantor does not consider such stratagems. Her role is to blindly procreate whatever the conditions. She is a ravenous defender of babies, the protector of pregnant women and as the head portrays – she sees, hears and thinks solely of babies, their well-being her sole agenda. Many pregnancies are seen as the ultimate of her blessings.



Erzulie Dantor
2003
mixed media
installation
8' x 4' x 15'
courtesy of Bernice
Steinbaum Gallery
Miami, FL

The portrayal of saints offers me a vehicle for exploring various psychological states while considering issues of gender. I am particularly interested in the issues of sexuality that surround the cult of virgin saints. Many female saints died horrible deaths to retain the virginity that they had dedicated to Christ as new converts to Christianity. Their counterparts, repentant whores such as Mary Magdalene,

are the other equally interesting female saints whose images inform my work. These women were rewarded for their retirement by veneration as holy penitents. Several of my most recent paintings incorporate self-portraits painted in the guise of particular saints with predellas of still life paintings depicting the attribute of the saint.



**Self Portrait as
Mater Dolorosa**
2003
oil on panel
22" x 14 1/2"

I am both an artist and a practitioner of the Orisha religion which is also known as Santeria (an Afro-Cuban religion based on Yoruba models). In addition to making ceremonial objects and ritual clothing, I design and create thrones for specific ritual occasions.



Crown for
Oshun

2000

mixed media

16" x 12" x 12"

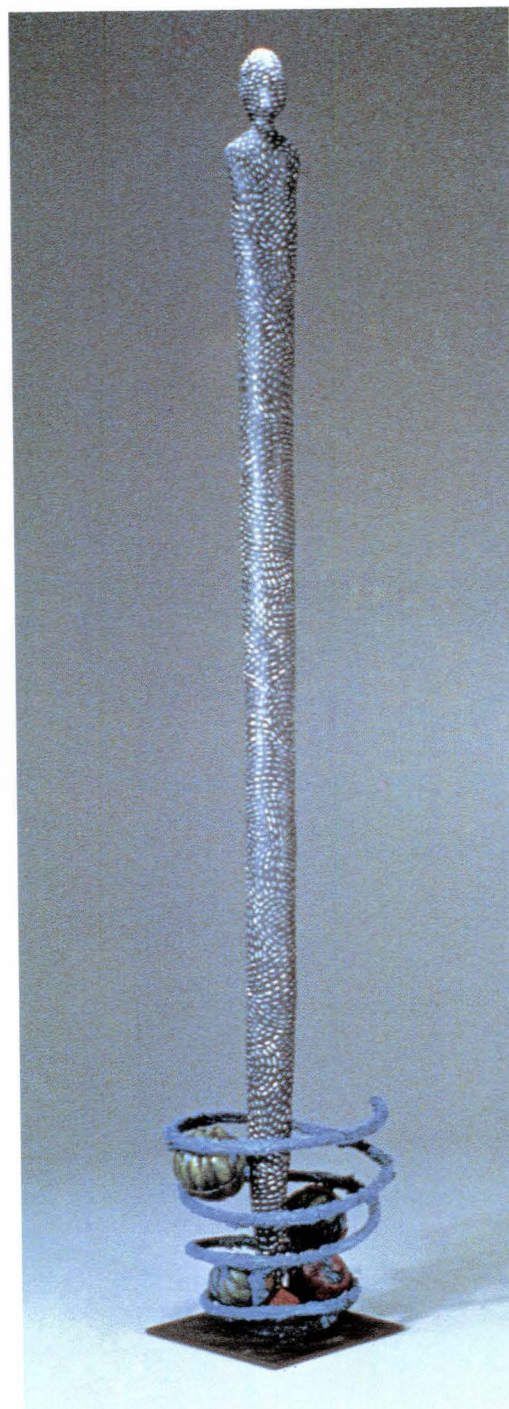
courtesy of the

Historical Museum of

Southern

Florida

he work that I make is a personal journey – sometimes enigmatic and poetic. I have always been interested in the vessel and the poetry surrounding the vessel has led me to the sculpture that I make. The vessel metaphor of interior and exterior (that reflect infinity and soul or site and culture) and the idea of containment (of spirit or narrative) have been important. Descriptions of the vessel include the shoulder, belly, lip and foot...all figurative descriptions. These ideas led me to my involvement with the figurative image. My tall sculptural figures might just be large pots...they are coil formed but enclosed hollow structures. My interest in American Indian and tribal art has also influenced my personal use of symbols for meaning. These cultures use symbol in their artforms. Each of my sculpture relates to an experience, exorcised feeling or time.



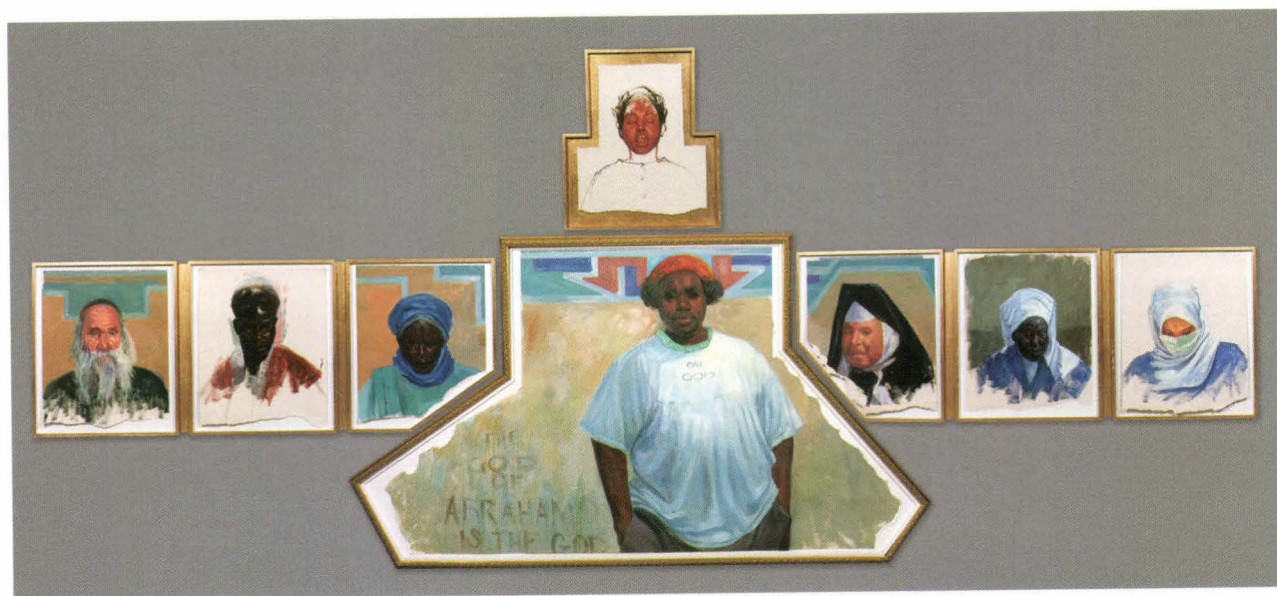
Water Prayer
2000
ceramic, metal &
flex stucco
85" x 12" x 12"

Ever since my sister's suicide in 1982, my work has been about loss. My recent works, larger than life-size shoes carved of pure white marble, are all titled *Ghost* to suggest the individual anonymity that eventually occurs after death – in spite of our personal quirks. The ghost in this work is also the 19th century – the memory of which still haunts our actions and attitudes about identity, class, race, gender and spirituality.



Ghost
2003
marble
17" x 11" x 25"

My work speaks to the nature of people, their relationship to society and their interaction with the Creator and their interpretation of His word. The work encompasses the needs and desires of the human spirit for redemption and salvation amidst a fast-paced world of entanglement, discourse, globalization and contradictions of today's society.



One God
2003
oil on paper
7' x 15'

Spiritual is a word often used to describe my work.

I believe this is due in part to its narrative, personal nature where roots, exile, life and death experiences; and love and hate relationships are all explored subject matter and universal issues that people relate to – regardless of their faith or denomination. Born and raised in a mixture of Spanish Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean Santería rituals,

allow me to see the world based on my personal experiences both as a 'nostalgic, uprooted Cuban' and a 'transplanted American' of no specific creed but with a tremendous passion for the force we call God and the belief that humanity will do the right thing. The symbolism, colors and references in the works are directly related to the rituals of mass, the notion of the afterlife and the many colorful deities within the practices of Santería.



El Trono Vacío

2002

mixed media fiber

36" x 23"

My spiritual leanings over the years have moved from God as an entity we humans relate to, separate from us mortals, towards a more all-encompassing view of God as spirit or energy – an energy that ties all life forms, the earth and the universe together as one. If everything is God, then it logically follows that everything is holy and deserves to be considered. This view cannot help but cause one to re-examine one's relationship with all other human beings, other

living creatures and to the earth. This view of the universe sometimes seems in direct conflict with my deeply ingrained Catholic upbringing with its strict and very specific doctrine. *Will Rover or Rob Go to Heaven?* contains a page from the Catholic catechism that tells us, 'only man has a body and a soul to save.' For me, making art is a very tangible way of dealing with these conflicting issues.

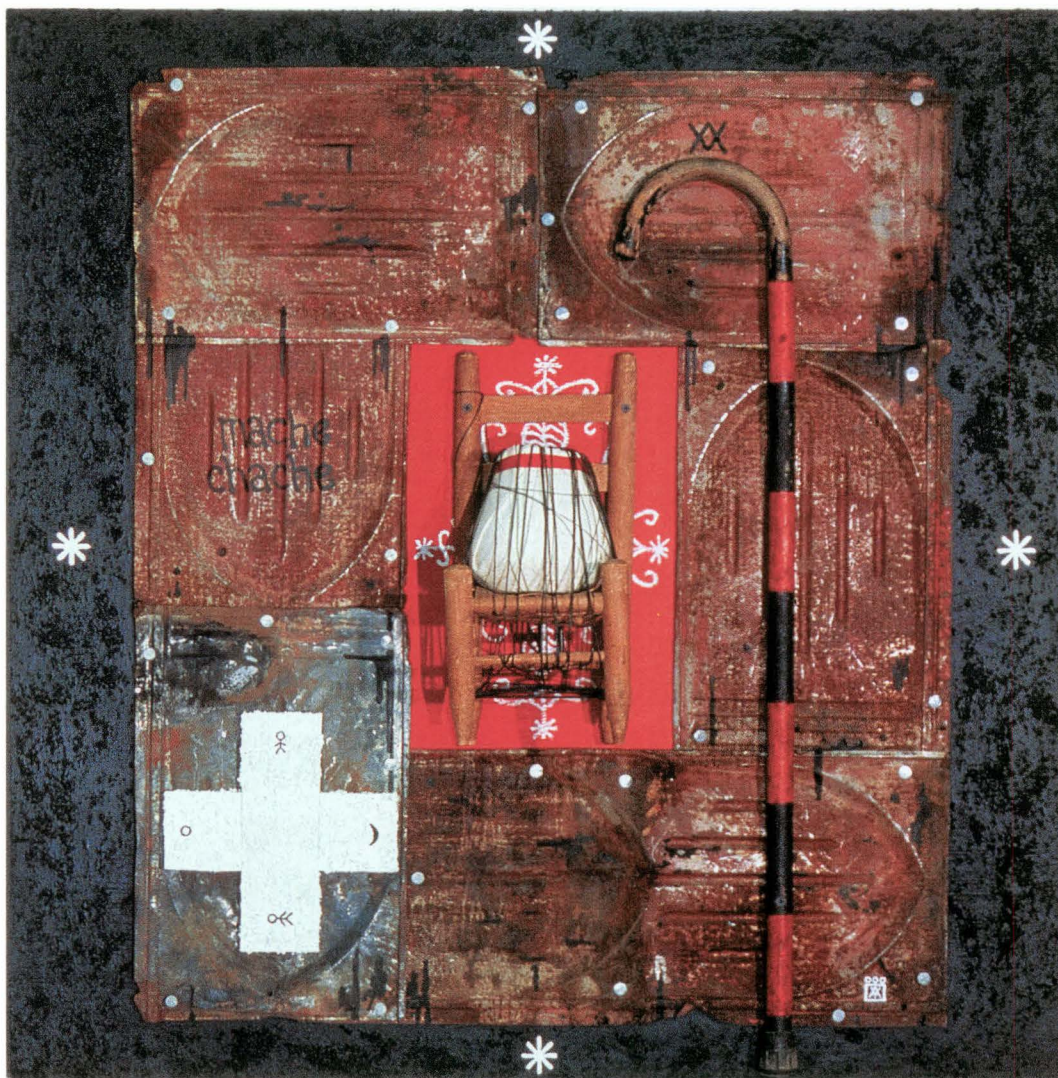


Will Rover or Rob Go to Heaven?

2001
candle wax, found objects, photocopies, acrylic & paper
on plywood
12"x 12"

My work is a point of intersection between the living and the ancestors that speak through the use of everyday objects (vessels of hidden histories and meaning) with the media of assemblage and installation. The use of the mundane object – once valued, used and later discarded – is similar to the way in which humans, historically and presently interact. As

spiritual beings having a human experience, it is our duty to honor our spiritual selves. I am an advocate for social/political justice and spiritual healing. My work exists to encourage the viewer to ponder his/her perspective of the issues presented and create a response toward understanding.



**Seat of Power
(Sitting in
Limbo)**

2002
mixed media on
wood panel
36" x 36" x 5 3/4"

Political and cultural conflict often stems from religious and cultural differences. My work often deals with religious subjects because individuals are so often persecuted or misunderstood because of their religious beliefs. *Jews Were Here* intentionally evokes the presence of a Jewish child in order to contrast the fate of real individuals with the mind numbing statistics that tell us of Jews murdered during World War II.

Martyr/Murder: Jerusalem is about the endless cycle of violence caused by the ongoing conflict between Palestinians and Israeli Jews. This piece evokes the presence of two teenage girls on opposite sides of this spiraling conflict, who are forever linked in their deaths.



**Martyr/Murder:
Jerusalem**
2002
wood, nails,
paper, photos
& gold leaf
15" x 10" x 7"

We create works of art knowing that silence and emptiness of space have the capacity to stimulate thought and focus our attention inward. We also believe that light has the capability

to transform and inspire. We, therefore, make significant use of light to create works that form numinous environments that warmly invite the visitor to spend short or extended times in contemplation.



**Meditation
Room**

Doernbecher
Children's
Hospital,
Portland, OR
1998

aluminum, gold
leaf, wood, brass,
light, orchids
18' x 18' x 9'

My work has evolved from using the detritus of our society; the stuff we throw away and expect to disappear. I use many different discarded materials in my work. I have chosen the mandala format to celebrate the bounty and beauty of our world. The mandalas are made out of caps and lids

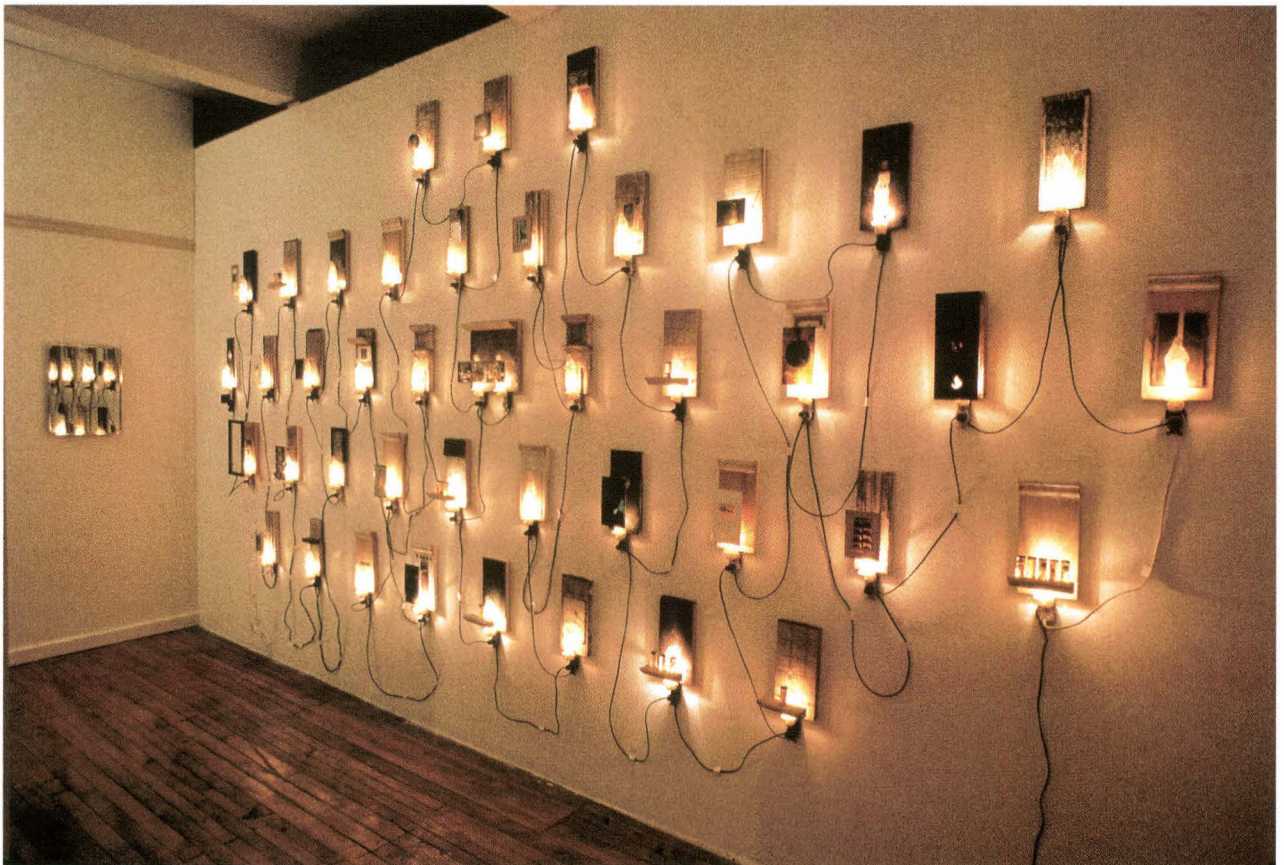
collected by friends and neighbors for a period of ten years. The caps are recycled into each new mandala. Each cap is a mark of food eaten or something consumed. Each installation is a community endeavor, which I direct with the caps I have collected.



**Mandala
Installation**
Founders Hall
Charlotte, NC
1999
20" x 20' x 20'

The *Chambers Series* is directly connected to my ideas about art, life, energy and spirituality. These issues relate to my experiences with formal religious teaching and training and specifically to the crass commercialization of Christianity in our culture. My spiritual beliefs have their basis in all religions. The *Chambers Series* hints at this with the myriad of wires, which link one piece, indirectly, to the others. There is no particular order to this configuration; but these seemingly random connections do establish a sense of unity or congruity. Each piece is designed to tell a story, ask a question, relate an experience, or serve as a visual metaphor.

As a whole the series is meant to provide glimpses into my conception of 'the spirit' and how it must be viewed holistically. Why Dollar Store nightlights? Originally, a kitsch slam at those who (may) believe in Christianity and thought it a good idea to cheapen (\$1.00 each) their savior by having him light the way in those hours of darkness (to the bathroom). In my opinion the manufacturers and/or the consumers of these lights are lost. The relationship between their spiritual beliefs and their mode of expression of those beliefs is more tangled than my mass of electrical wires.



**Chamber
Series**
1996-2003
mixed media
installation
dimensions vary

As a pantheist, I try to capture my experience in nature. That experience is a spiritual one for me where I am connecting with the body of God. I believe that God did not create physical matter and is separate from it but that nature is the physical manifestation of God...God's flesh and blood. I draw on religious art from other times and cultures for the

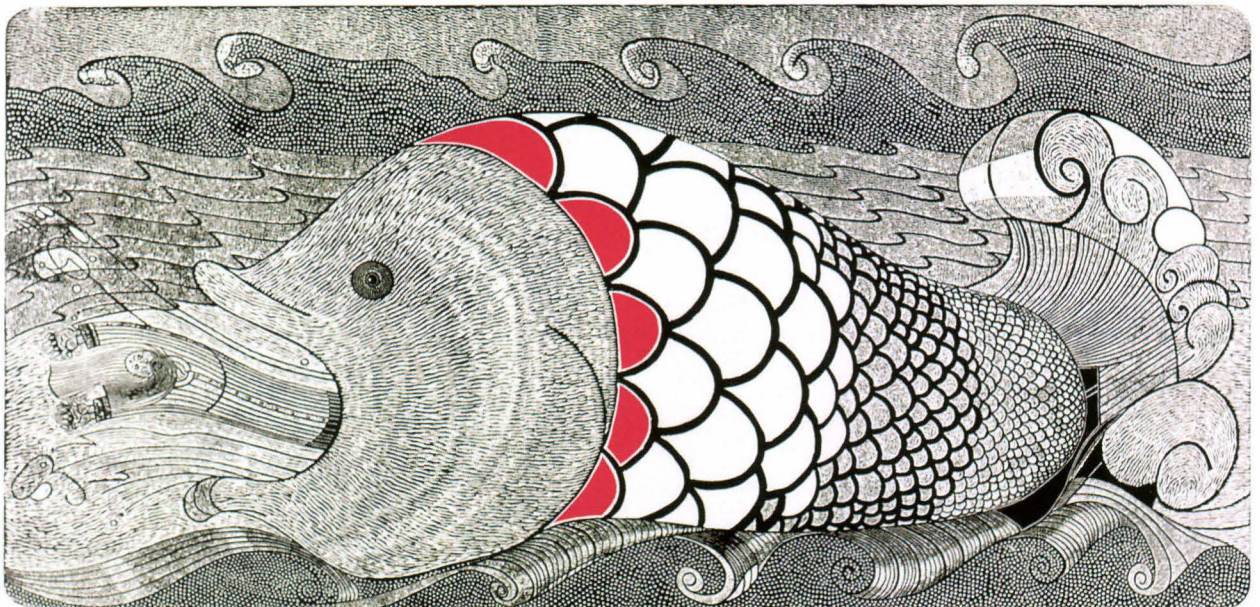
structural and stylistic basis of my paintings. I have studied and am informed by medieval paintings, Tibetan *thangka* painting, Indian miniatures and Balinese paintings. I am interested in all traditional painting from cultures that have connected with the earth.



**North
Cascades
National Park**
2000
acrylic on canvas
36" x 52"
courtesy of Blue Spiral
Gallery, Asheville, NC

Art for me, is not just a way of life, but life itself. It is the correlation of my total experience, of which my art form is the creative record. The studio is my chapel. The art form is my offering and prayer. Many of my images depict universal

man – his hopes, dreams, fears, suffering and pain, along with his hang-ups. Religious themes permeate my work and biblical text often serves as the creative inspiration.



**Jonah and the
Big Fish**

1999

woodcut
36" x 72"

Although I have spent some of my adult life questioning God's wisdom and even God's existence, I usually find myself seeking strength and serenity in the images and icons I have spent a life time revering. Images, symbols and attributes of the Virgin Mary, other patron saints and martyrs are often

juxtaposed with or painted as more contemporary figures. The symbolism is often ambiguous and ambivalent; personal yet universal devices such as flowering vines, niches and cages, both imprison and protect the figures.



Virgin with Sparrow

2002

acrylic on panel
in shadowbox
with fretwork
overlay
12" x 14"

My mosaics are influenced by the Christian art of medieval and early Renaissance Europe, Judaism, Islam and many non-western religious practices. The mosaic masks pay homage to

the Mayan ritual of creating a spirit mask of the deceased to ease his passage into the 'land of the fleshless.' The objects on the forehead signify the new spirit mind and the objects in the mouth indicate the spirit heart.



Passage

2002

glass, fused glass,
gold, silver &
ceramic
36" x 24"

These non-representational mixed media talismen are intended for use as meditative aids. The talismen are intended to help individuals and communities focus on goals both material and spiritual. The talismanic images arise out of a process of meditation in which I consider the desired problem or goal and envision the most positive outcome imaginable. The use of talismen is an ancient practice, which

has been refined and elaborated on by Tantric and Tibetan Buddhists. The talismen are constructed from a combination of traditional artist media (paint, paper, gold leaf, etc.) and natural materials such as sand, dirt, leaves and other plant matter. The natural materials often come from locations symbolically associated with the talisman's function or intent.



**Talisman for
Spiritual
Ascent**
2003
mixed media
10" x 8"

"In order to invent heaven and hell, a person would need to know nothing except the human body."

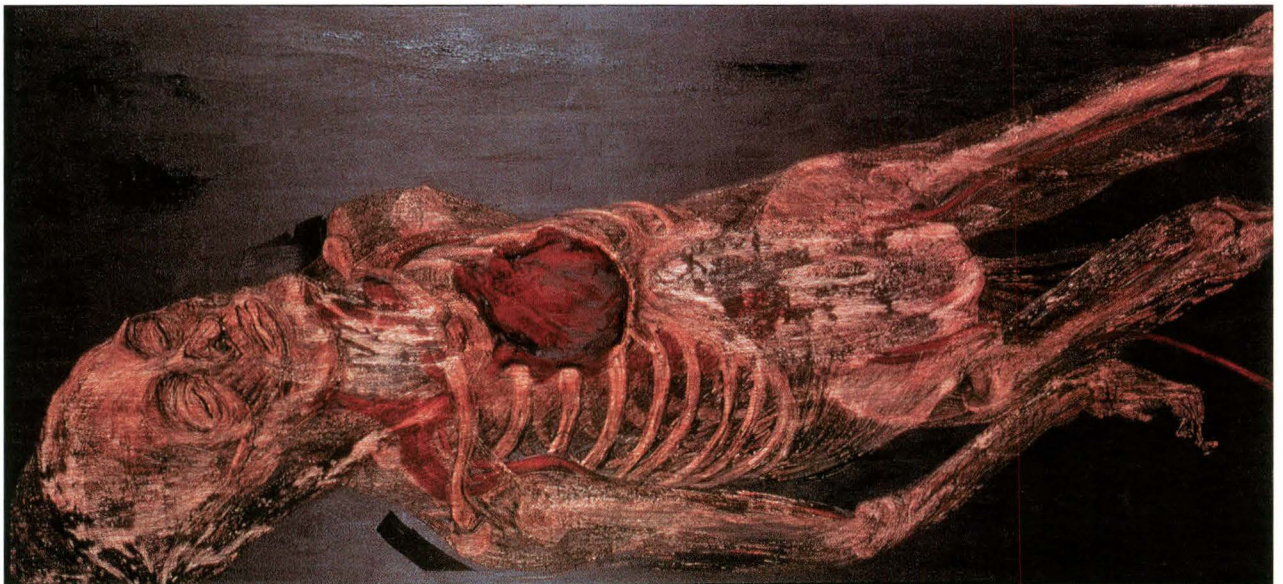
Jose Saramago, *Blindness*

The body is the seat of the soul. We are embodied and our experiences of the world and our actions in the world all proceed in and through our bodies, where all that is good or bad, lovely or ugly can be focused, felt and acted on. I like to deceive myself into thinking like the ancients, that the soul can be found. If I just keep drawing inside and out, one day I will turn a corner into a dark moist tunnel – someplace I have passed by before too quickly to really see. There will be the soul waiting to be captured into my net of charcoal lines.

Blood Island

2000

oil & wax
on wood
36" x 80"



I collect and make things because I have a visceral response to them. I like objects with a history, both real and implied. I like to look and touch. Words do not interfere much with my thought processes. When I read art books, I just look at the pictures.



Devil Face Jug
2003
ceramic
14" x 11" x 6"

Much of my work is about a search for spiritual stillness and belonging in a world that seems, despite a predominance of reductive and empirical paradigms, awry and adrift on a sea of chaos. Jorge Louis Borges, in one of his poems ("Las Cosas" from *Elogio de la Sombra*, 1969), describes objects as though they occupy a silent realm, which is poised to serve its human occupant. Once used and put aside, these objects wait, patiently, until they are used again. Implicit in this idea, wistful

and fantastical though it may be, is the understanding that a connection exists between the objects in any given environment and the person occupying that space.

Photography, born of space, time and the realm of the objects and actualities, capitalizes on this connection between the inanimate and animate. It can render the same sort of visual clues as those offered up when a diviner reads an oracle or when an individual seeks wisdom and insight from mythological narratives.



Expiration II
2003
digital pigment
32" x 24"

"Many of us have one room in our house that is filled with a motley assortment of oddballs accumulated from all sorts of places. No one seems to have any connection with the other."

Jane Ballow, *Antiquing the Easy Way*, Craft Course Publishers, 1967

Similarly, our lives are a sort of a motley assortment of experiences. These experiences unified in a single life interact with other individual's experiences thereby enlarging each assortment of experiences. A sort of 'layering' of meaning develops in each life. I approach my work as it represents our lives – layers of meaning developed through time. This compilation yields the excessive quality in my work. I address rather simple ideas that become complex through visual presentation.

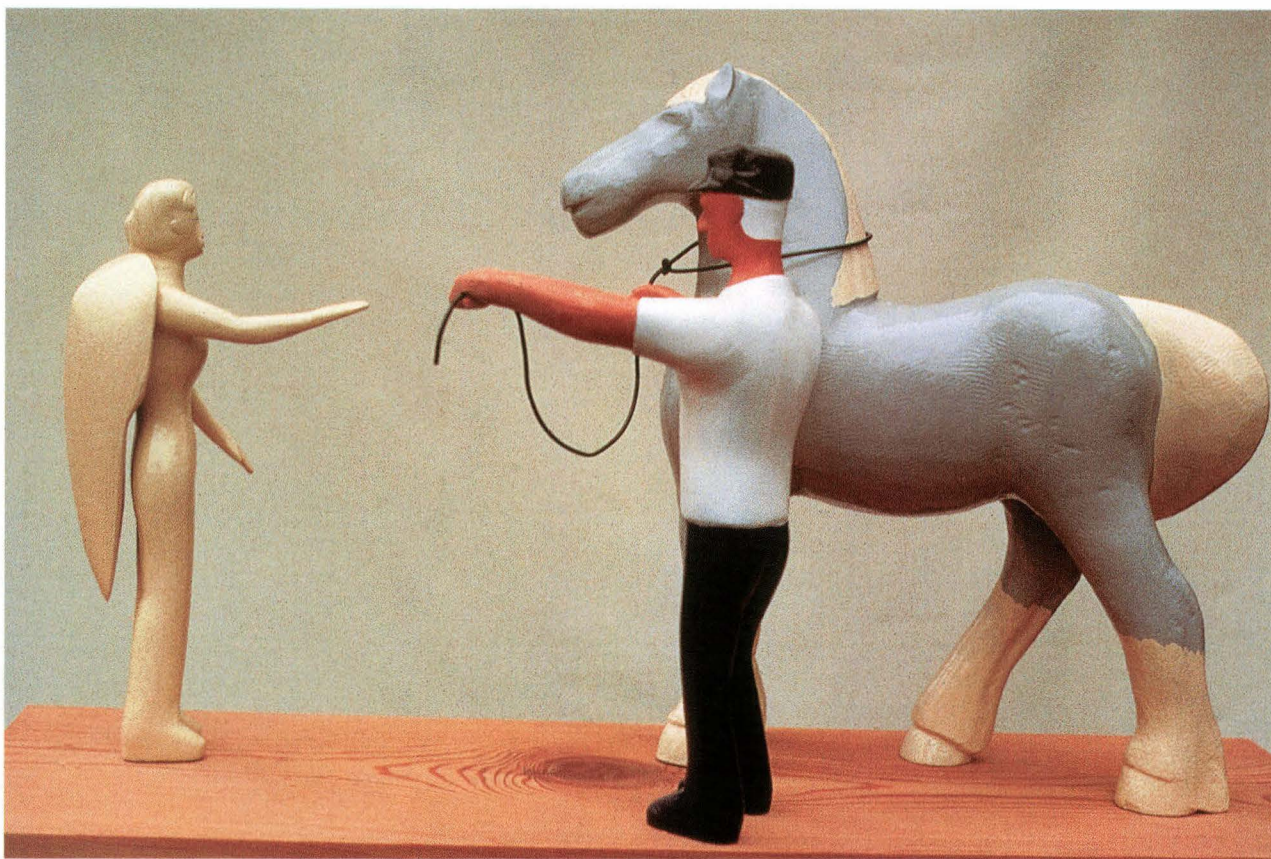


**Warring
Unbelief**

2001
acrylic & collage
48" x 72"

I am a grassroots conceptual sculptor. I pair concepts, including spiritual concepts, with personal images. My work is embraced by those who know God as well as those who are more or less voyeurs of the personal worlds of folk and outsider artists. *Angel Takes the Lead: She's a Beautiful Horse* depicts me handing the lead of Silver Molly to a woman

veterinarian unaware that I would never see Molly again in this world. After Molly's death I received a call from a man who said that he had done her autopsy. The sole purpose of his call was to say, "she is a beautiful horse." At that point I had a flashback of me handing over the lead and the image took on new meaning to me.



**Angel Takes the
Lead - She's a
Beautiful Horse**

2000

wood & paint
18" x 30" x 10"

The selection of a casket and the preparations for burial are the last vestiges of caring commitment to the well being of another. This work has the familiar shape of a casket but one that is too narrow to hold a body. Its overall look is one of an embellished sacred reliquary that instead of holding the bones of the departed saint or the thought of a disembodied spirit, holds instead the pages of an inserted book of documents of remembered actions. It seems that things can

look spiritual and sound spiritual but sincere, unfeigned genuine spirituality is manifested in unselfish caring actions. One of the quotations on the box is 'A kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand' was made by Christ and points to the consequences of selfishness in an existence without personal commitments of caring for others in places of worship, friendships, marriages, families and communities.



**Natural &
Theological
Virtues No. I**

2003

mixed media

30" x 78" x 11"

These drawings depict the religious snake handling practices of certain Holiness churches in Southern Appalachia. An initial impression upon viewing the drawings is the realist documentation of the folk history of Southern Appalachia. Upon reflection however, the viewer discovers the interwoven influence and roles that serpents and snakes have

played throughout the course of both Christianity and art history. The interaction is strikingly demonstrated by the use of classical and Renaissance poses for the contemporary realist figures in the drawings. Numerous allusions are made to famous Renaissance and classical works which depict scenes in the history of Christianity and mythology in which serpents played a predominant role.



**The Ecstasy of
Saint Columbia**
Gay Hollins
of Jolo
2000
chalk & charcoal
on paper
58" x 58"

My work is a fusion of African spirits and Christian mysticism. I work in a tradition of the Voudun religions of equatorial America. I depict Catholic saints and African gods in bits and pieces of junk, scrap and found objects. They become glittering shrines and embodiments of deities. They are altarpieces. The altar is the landscape of the soul – a place where prayer meets flesh.



**St. Martha and
the Chickens**

2003

mixed media

13" x 13" x 18"

(each piece)

In this body of work, I find myself coming home to the American South where I grew up – Land of the Bible Belt, gospel music, PTL Network, Jim and Tammy Baker; and Wednesday night church dinners. I photographed a cross section of women in the Bob Jones University community including students, faculty and administration staff. Bob Jones University is a Christian school in Greenville, South Carolina, which was founded in 1927. Bob Jones University is not affiliated with any religious denomination, but is dedicated to the

teaching and propagation of its fundamentalist Christian religious beliefs. Each of the women agreed to sit for two portraits – one traditional and another of an object that held sacred significance for them. My hope was to allow the women to reveal their lives as they see themselves and to ask questions about what makes one "surrender her life to Christ, become a member of a religious community and often times spend her entire life there."

**Rachel N.
Buiter**
2003
sepia toned
silver gelatin print
24" x 20"
(each piece)



I was raised as a Southern Baptist in rural North Carolina. I spent several decades exploring the ideology of the spiritual life/religions of the world. I have been at peace with my belief system as I constructed it for some time now. I find that my early religious indoctrination continues to present itself

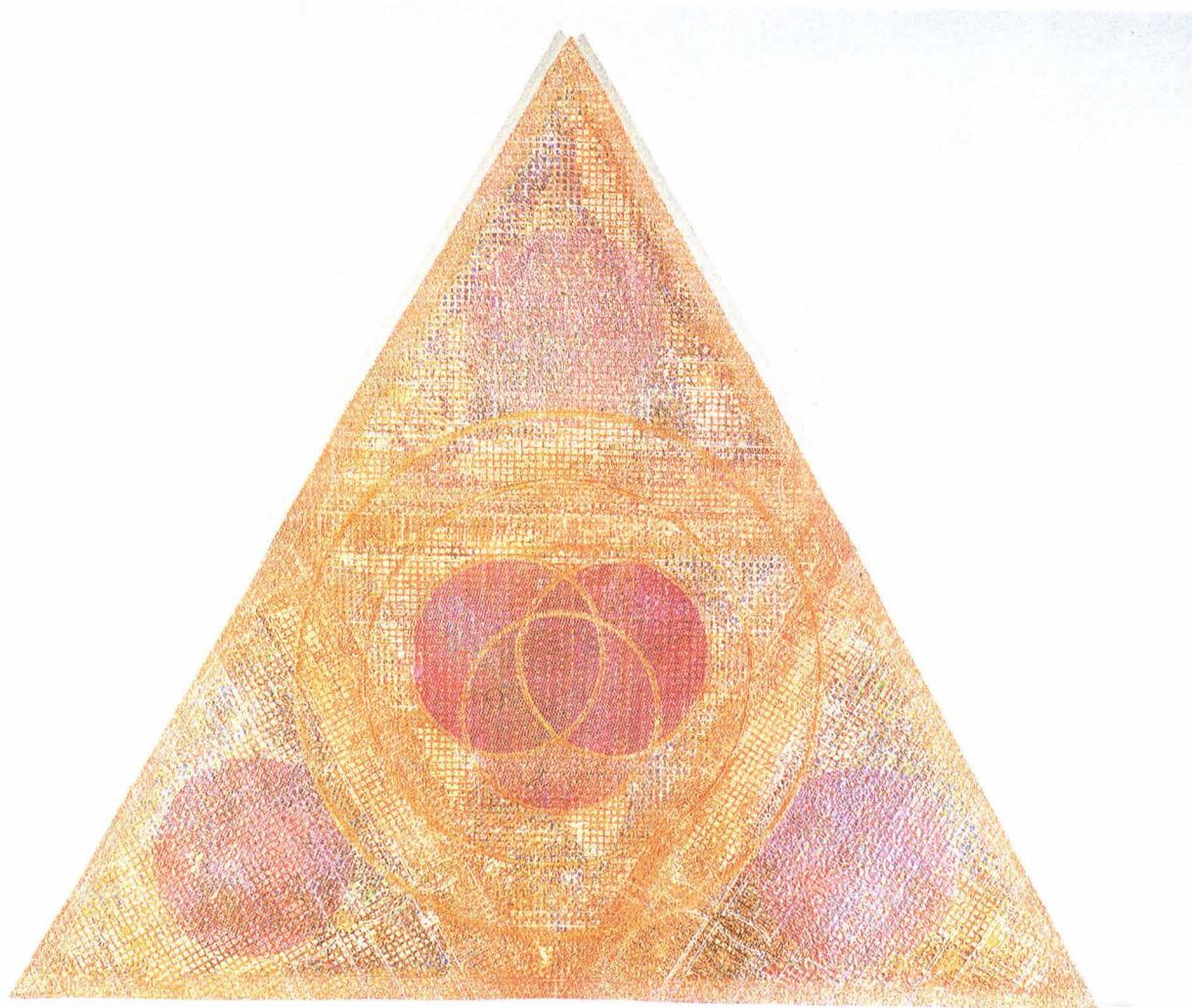
within my work. Recently, the internal dialogue involves relationships and religious iconography which is one part of a puzzle I have been assembling to help me understand and work through life's challenges.



Tree of Life
2000
wood, copper
foam, paper
glass & steel
11' x 96" x 72"

The sixteenth century 'celestial scientist' Michel de Nostredame predicted the earth will end and that the human race will survive and colonize space. Currently, as reported in *Astronomy* magazine, the Hubble and Chandra telescopes, and recent satellite explorations of space have provided beautiful new images of the evolving universe around our galaxy, the birthing of stars, new and developing galaxies and possible habitable planets similar to our world dotting our

own galaxy. Additional spiritual reading, as presented in the *Urantia Book* has influenced my new creations. This volume describes the history and development of our planet including visions of paradise, our mortal and spiritual purposes, the Trinity permutations, and the "seven evolving super universes which compromise the evolving grand universe governed by God the Sevenfold."



**The Trinity:
Infinite Spirit**
2002
mixed media
36" x 42"

Sixty percent of the adult human body is made of water. That comes to roughly, ten gallons per person. This basic, implausible fact simultaneously demonstrates the insignificance and the wonder of life. It testifies that we are just a combination of organic compounds that eventually decompose and are reintroduced to the earth as separate elements. However, the fact that these simple elements create music, argue, fall in love, and feel despair, is undeniably miraculous. *Body of Water* was inspired by visits to the old cemeteries in downtown Charleston. I am drawn to the

beauty of the weatherworn gravestones that forms cradles around the graves. At many sites, the stones are sinking into the ground, overwhelmed by the foliage around it. The stones were intended to provide a permanent symbol of life, but the sharp geometry of the cut stones have eroded into soft, organic edges, and their names and dates are unreadable. They remind us that our attempts at preservation are futile. The walls of these graves are like the pillaged ruins of a small fortress.

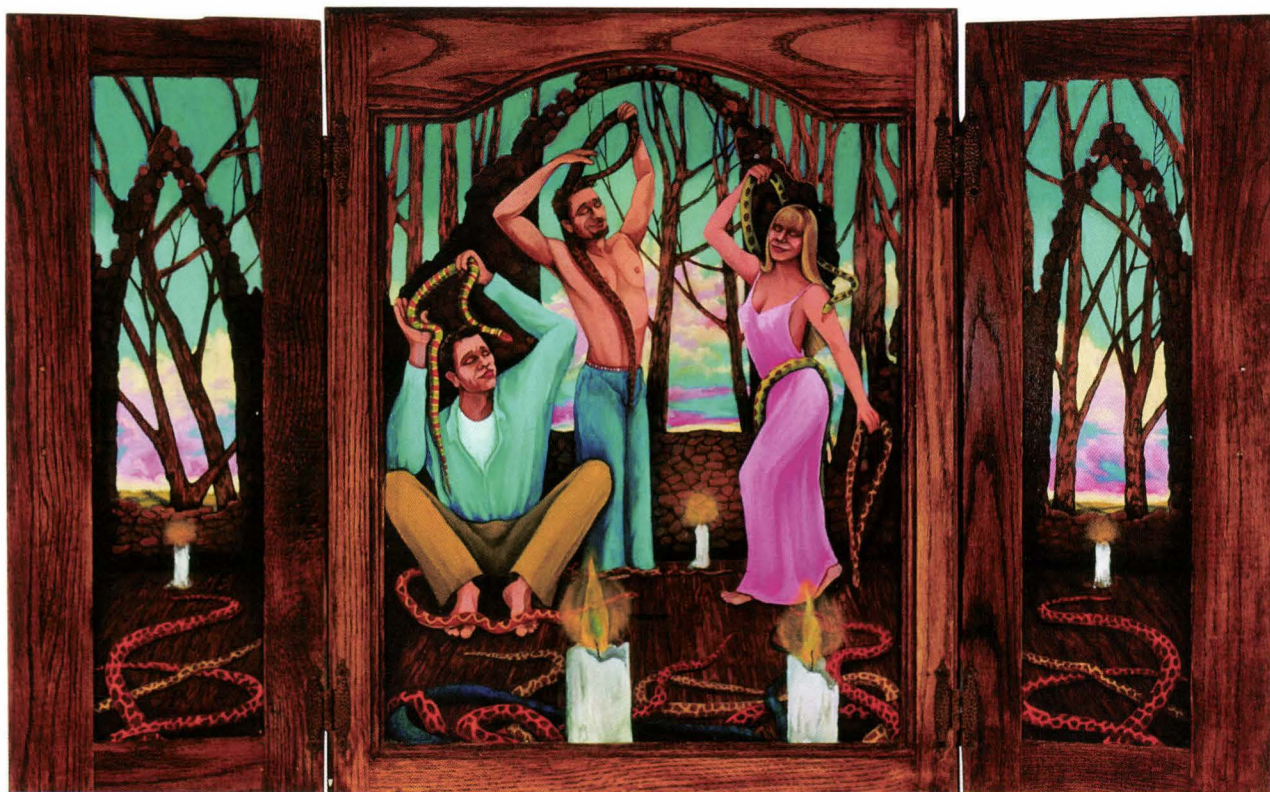


Body of Water
2003
cast iron
glass jugs & water
28" x 24" x 65"

Having been raised in a religious background has been a major influence in the development of much of my work. I have many vivid memories of the colors of the windows, the separation of the panes, the wood of the altar and pews; and the cross. I began a series of crosses earlier in my career as a means of self-healing. This work was very much a personal

diary or journal. As resolutions were made with certain issues, they were recorded as new ones were arising. Shortly after beginning the series, I started a new career in the field of social work, which became a new inspiration and continues to influence the direction of my work.

Pentecost
2003
oil on wood
24" x 24 1/2"



I believe in the New Testament church found in the hearts of people dedicated to God. I wish to paint the model Christian life humble like Christ in his teachings. On July 6, 1989, I saw a vision to paint art with the world on fire and the coming of the Lord. After five years of painting any and everything including Biblical art, I felt compelled to paint prophecy,

especially the "Book of Revelation" of the New Testament Bible. I believe the Bible is the Word of God and the Holy Spirit will reveal it. The visual arts, in my opinion, is one of the greatest communicators of all – an educational device that God has given us.



The Four Horsemen
1995

acrylic on canvas
48"x 36"

courtesy of the South
Carolina State
Museum
Columbia SC

By combining imagery from Catholic mysticism with fairy tales. I bring to life the world I once saw as a child. That world was a hybrid of sensual Catholicism left behind by my parents and the spirited, powerful fairy tales that I used as a replacement. Our house had walls filled with statues and paintings of saints. My library was filled with fairy tales. Not only did fairy tales empower me as a child, it also taught me

moral codes that were instrumental in developing my gentle nature. Stories of saints and the teachings of Christ do very much the same thing by setting examples. I underscore these comparisons in my most recent work. My spiritual inclination compels me to create and surround myself with my own symbols that continue to stimulate and empower me.



**Cut from the
Same Cloth
(Cinderella and
St. Francis)**
2002
acrylic on canvas
40" x 52"

This work is from an installation titled *Model Citizens*. The pose for *Poor Paul* is taken from Caravaggio's painting of Paul on the road to Damascus.



Poor Paul

2000

wood & pigment

17" x 55" x 28"

courtesy of Cleveland

Springs Gallery, Shelby

NC & Franklin

Parrasch Gallery

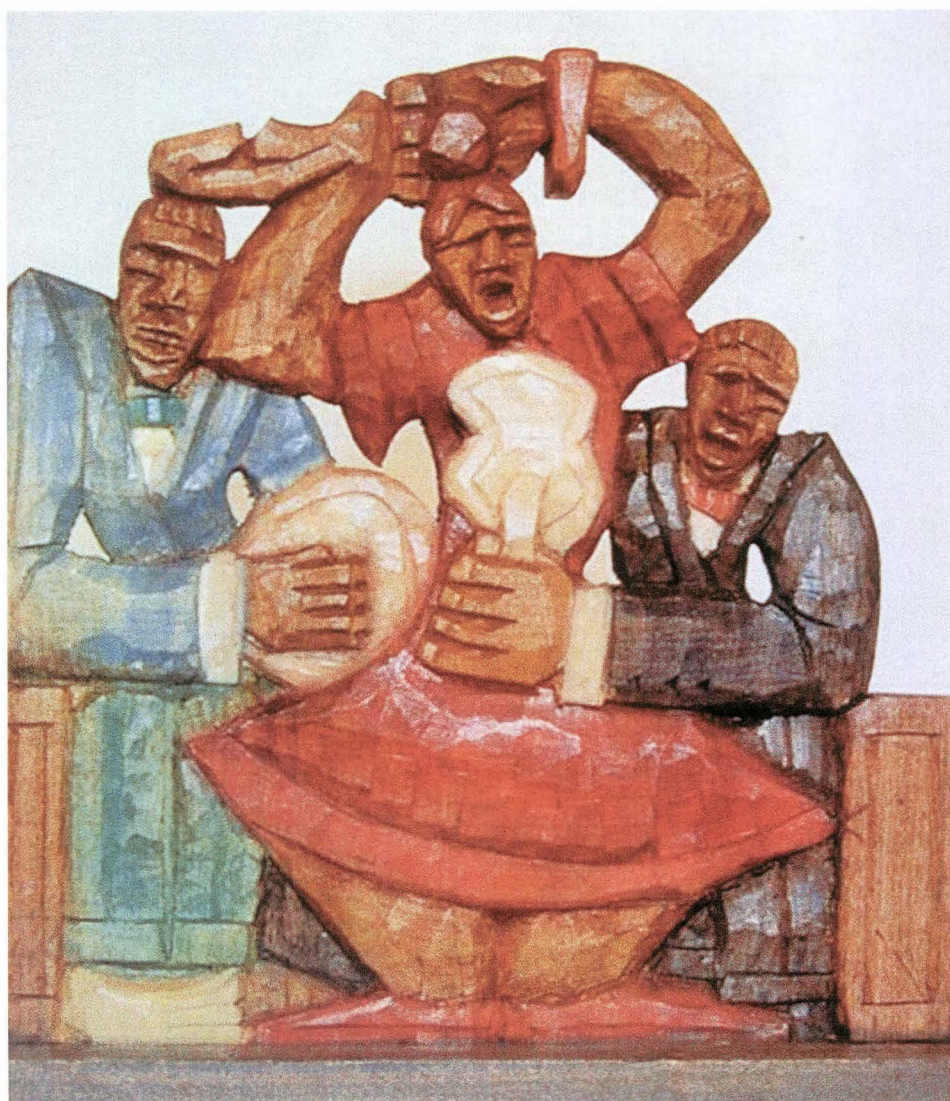
NYC

Leo Twiggs

Lavon Van Williams

I am fortunate to have inherited an African-American way of carving that my great-uncle taught me. In my teens, I became interested in the Buffalo Soldiers of the post-Civil war era. Since I began carving at age 15, I have tried to remain faithful

to the tradition and the unique visual language it employs. I strive to retain the essential spirit and dynamic nature of the tradition. Life in the African-American community – the religious rituals, children, musicians – is the central focus of my work.



**Devil's Always
Trying to Close
the Gate**

n.d.

wood & paint

20" x 19 1/2" x 4 3/4"

courtesy of the
Art Exchange
Columbus, GA

An exploration of the relationship of myself to experiences beyond my immediate comprehension is an overall focus in my work. My paintings attempt to solve riddles that perplex me and to reconcile events that trouble me. Thus, for me, painting is about thinking about things and sorting them out. Enigmatic and elemental experiences such as birth, death, love, devotion, wonder, loss, despair, faith, renewal and transcendence are tied to events in my life and are the

subjects that I explore in my work. It is a process that helps me as a human come to terms with these issues. This validates the experience of painting for me, making it a sort of spiritual exercise – a vehicle for contemplation. The paintings in "The Dance of Death" series are both a summary of events in my own life and a reflection on their significance.



The Hanged Man
from
"The Dance of Death" Series
2003
oil on linen
72" x 38"

My work is a direct expression of information from other realms. By bringing it into this world through my art, I hope to make viewers aware of a greater dimensionality of life – a view very different from normal day to day reality. The

Universe Series is my expression of the unity of life and spirit aided and abetted by natural forces on a cosmic scale, documented in time to show perception changes in the world view.



**Universe #9 –
End Times/
Extraterrestrial**
2002
acrylic on paper
30" x 45 1/2"



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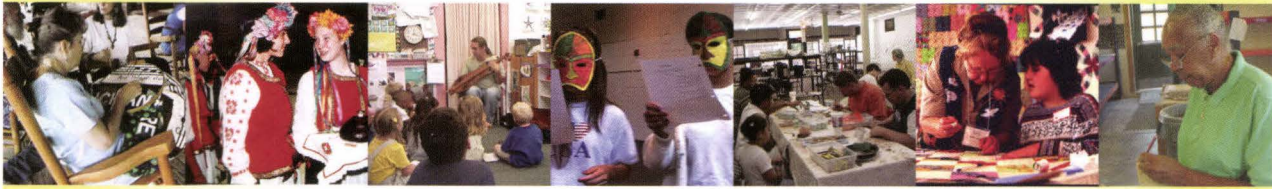
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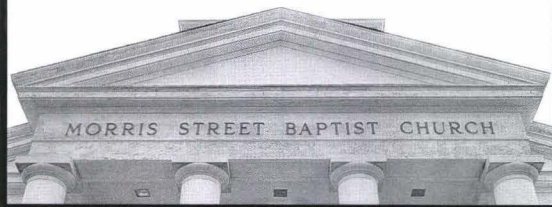
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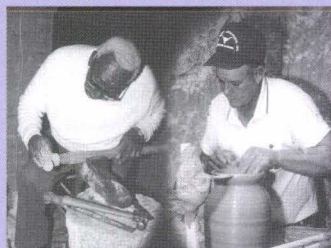
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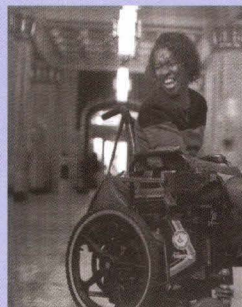
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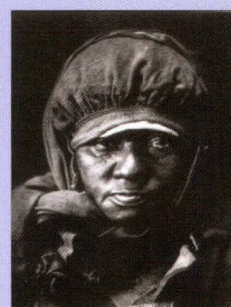
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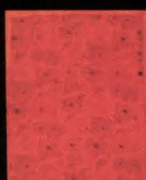
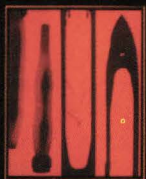
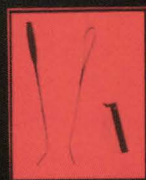
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WHEN FIRE
DESTROYED
THE ARCADE
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THAT
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MORNING, A
SMELL OF
SCORCHED
YARN HUNG IN
A PALL OVER
MOST OF THE
TOWN. EVEN
THOSE WHO
KNEW
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A GENTLE FLAME

"I think our society doesn't value these times and I wonder why is that? Are we afraid of being thought crazy? Are we afraid people won't believe us? Or that they will? When people tell me their stories of visions and experience, there's a gentleness and quietness. It's as if they've been opened up in a way they can't forget. I think the world can use more of this gentle flame."

Lesley Dill, in a letter to Reverend John Mendez

LIFE is big, fast, and complicated. What we perceive as reality is only the reflection of a system of learned and manufactured responses to our environment and our culture. We are bombarded inescapably by messages that we're too fat, can't function without new gizmos, need to invest in promising stocks, and are helpless when it comes to global warming or voting for a president. Distracted by such fare, we pay too little attention to the tiny acts that connect us to one another. We overlook life's poignant moments, those that give substance to mystery.

In *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy*, Lesley Dill looks beyond the limited mask of reality – or, as she refers to it, "the normal cadence of life." Her artistic investigation began with the seemingly simple yet complex act of availing her soul to hundreds of residents from this region, in the process making herself very vulnerable. Her selfless generosity opened many doors, led to the formation of strong personal relationships, and charted a vibrant new direction for her work and life.

In January 2000, Dill was asked to partake in a residency at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem as part of the museum's Artist and the Community series, a program that dates back to 1994. This landmark series brings nationally recognized artists to the

Piedmont region of North Carolina to work with diverse community groups in realizing projects that are both specific to this area and challenge the artist to seek new directions of activity. In some cases, such as this one, the effects on the artist, the community, and even the contemporary art museum experience, can be transforming.

According to Lesley Dill, "The project started from a seed of an idea, and a curator and a museum saying yes, and then ultimately a community saying yes." She followed this statement with a quote from Emily Dickinson: "There is a small italic seed, a blossom of the brain." Early discussions of the project generated a host of seeds, some falling to the side and others taking root, slowly evolving into a shape and direction.

Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy evolved into a multi-tiered project: an exhibition of new works inspired by more than 700 vision statements collected by the artist; a series of large billboards strategically placed on a major North Carolina highway and duplicated in the museum for the exhibition; an opening night Spiritual Sing with the Emmanuel Baptist Church Spiritual Choir; a documentary film by the North Carolina School of the Arts chronicling the history of the choir and Dill's involvement with it; and finally, two publications, this catalogue and a separately printed collection of the 700 vision statements.

As a young teen, Dill had a vision, one that she had kept hidden until this project. "I grew up in Maine and had a bedroom window that looked out unto some woods. One morning when I was fourteen and was getting dressed for school, I sat on the bed and looked out the window at the dark leaves against the sky. Somehow, my whole visual screen was suddenly filled with a sort of weblike spiral of images that appeared black on white or white on black. At that moment, I was given to understand the world. I understood

pestilence, sorrow, and the hugeness of everything. I understood that there was a pattern threaded through all things—and that it was all right. This was accompanied by a feeling of bliss, which I had never experienced before." During this project, Dill discussed this vision and other experiences at every public presentation. Her willingness to share her thoughts and visions on such a personal level erased the barriers between her and her audience. It also fostered an environment of respect in which everyone's voice was equally important.

Dill's longtime investigations into the physicality of language and experience prepared her to expand her individual spiritual journey into a community effort. Over the past several years, Dill has collaborated with other artists, dancers, and students in her staged performances, university residencies, and a series of billboards done in conjunction with GraphicStudio, the Institute for Research in Art in Tampa, Florida. In all of these activities, Dill relied on pre-existing poetic phrases from the works of Emily Dickinson, Franz Kafka, Rainer Rilke, Salvador Espriu, and others, to conjure up her images. Now, she would alter her working process by using not pre-existing texts, but rather the vernacular visionary language of people from all walks of life.

Working with SECCA, Dill devised methods of collecting visions, mystical experiences, dreams, and moments of wonder that are natural and inspiring to us all. She met with the community during public presentations in a range of settings: libraries, bookstores, churches, schools, colleges, and universities. She and SECCA canvassed the area with posters, newspaper and radio announcements. SECCA established a special e-mail comment box available through the museum's website and added a voice mailbox to the museum's phone system. Dill also listened to hours of stories in one-on-one settings.

During Dill's public presentations, her natural warmth and sincerity quickly erased barriers and eliminated hierarchy. These meetings were informal gatherings, as when old friends might meet. She often enriched her presentations with the language of poets: "I have given my whole life to words" (Espriu); "Take all away from me, but leave me ecstasy"

(Dickinson); "My soul dressed in silence rises up" (Dickinson).

Audience members received a questionnaire describing the project and providing a forum for sharing intimacies with the artist. Attached cards requested personal information, but also allowed the participant to remain anonymous. The questionnaire asked such questions as: Have you ever experienced feelings of peacefulness, bliss, rapture, or all knowingness? Have you ever experienced anything that you couldn't explain? How have any of these experiences affected, inspired, or transformed your life?

From the resulting collection of vision statements, Dill selected segments that reflected "people's personal experience with the mysterious. According to the artist, "These stories revealed how complex and how simple this mysticism is. They're all about this tension. Everything has a context of complication that has some acceptance of the range of life. It's not sweet or sentimental as we thought it might prove to be. It's not one point of pure understanding. It's rich – it mirrors life that way."

In July 2000 Dill took her message to 400 high school students who were involved in the Governor's School West program. Begun in 1963, this special summer institute, which has served as a model for similar institutions across the United States, promotes contemporary ideas in academics and the performing arts. Participants are drawn from all over the state of North Carolina. Many of the vision statements offered by the Governor's School students were astounding: In one of the statements, an unnamed student wrote, "I lost myself to my senses. It was as though all previous knowledge and experience left me and I felt weightless. It was not being reborn or seeing things for the first time, but opening to my surroundings to such an extent that I became part of them. I did not feel separated from anything or alone because I had no sense of myself." Another student reported, "I am frequently taken over by language and possibility. The sentences come, complex, fully formed. They keep me up at night. My head is loud and busy – I'm thrilled but scared some of the words will slip away."

Even offerings recounting experiences only tangential to Dill's interests evoked her central theme of a sense of wonder. Another unnamed student wrote, "A powerful vision of music as a means of therapy emerged after visiting a loved one in a rest home facility. As a means of giving back to the community, playing the violin for the infirmary arouses emotions of peacefulness and fulfillment. Touching one's life through a loving musical atmosphere is a vision worth much more than getting paid."

Weaving together phrases from the Governor's School students' stories, Dill directed a performance at nearby Salem College. Following a series of call-and-response sessions with the students, she divided the audience into four segments –



each with their own word phrases, rhythm, and timing – and choreographed it all together. The basic text for the performance included the following phrases:

The room is on fire
The air is like a drink
My insides melt into liquid light
I hear a voice
She tells me her secrets
Am I really here?
The world has stopped-taken a breath
(He looks crazy everywhere but his eyes)
She looks crazy everywhere but her eyes
I'm drowning in light
I fall to the ground

The students' enthusiasm for this performance marked a turning point in the project. The first several presentations had been sparsely attended, but after this performance, the word got out. Dill used the resulting vision statements to inform a new body of works of art. She also used the collected stories to create the billboards, and provide lyrics for the songs sung by the Emmanuel Baptist Church Spiritual Choir. Every discussion, presentation, phone call, fax, and venue contributed to the fabric of the whole project. Single acts and interactions multiplied over the course of the residency in an expanding network of social architecture. For Dill, the artistic act was connecting the interactions between the expanding community and herself, weaving the loose threads of mysticism into an overall fabric that changed shape, contours, size, and direction.

To create the billboard component of the project, the museum partnered with photographer Jackson Smith, and Sherri Lutz and Tom Poe of Fairways Outdoor Advertising. After sketching her ideas, Dill directed a photo-shoot in one of SECCA's public spaces using models of different ages, races, and genders, some of whom had played important roles in the project. Back in her studio, Dill worked and reworked those photographs, selecting images to be scanned into Poe's computer. Poe and Dill then designed the billboards in a collaborative effort. In *My Name Was Called*, an open-mouthed, well-dressed man spews forth both language and image into an airy void. In a smeared hand-stamped fashion, the text ("My Name was Called, In Darkness I See") floats above and below a raining cascade of open eyes. The text evokes what Dill calls "a quiet path of inner spirituality, opening life to possibility."

In *I Have Left My Body Twice*, another billboard work, Dill visually articulates a rather realistic portrayal of an out-of-the-body experience, making it seem normal and matter-of-fact. The work shows a young woman spinning controllably

through space, as if she has the power to direct her destination. In a related bannerlike work created for the exhibition, Dill depicts twin sets of two women, one standing behind the other (who is sitting) on either side of the banner, guarding the banner like dignified centurions. The women are dressed in black, and from their solemn faces hang long black veils. The text reads: "I was born with a veil. When I see visions, I always tell somebody. They are my witness." Floating in the top right-hand corner is another woman, matronly in nature. The banner is based on the story of one of Dill's sources who was indeed born with a veil, a thin membrane of skin that stretched across the face. This is sometimes referred to as a "caul," a portion of the membrane that surrounds a fetus and sometimes covers the head at birth. In some segments of our culture, infants born with cauls are specially regarded as being gifted with "second sight" vision.

In Tampa, Dill's billboards had been placed at donated sites around the city. In Winston-Salem, however, the four large billboards were positioned strategically along North Carolina Route 52, a major north-south thoroughfare for those traveling through Winston-Salem and the state. The placement of the billboards on Route 52 was ideally suited to this project. Route 52 is referred to locally as "the zone," a barrier that physically separates a large segment of the African-American and Hispanic communities from the rest of Winston-Salem.

According to Mel White, director of African-American programs for Old Salem, "In the mid-70s, when the construction of the highway began, the building of it damaged the fabric of the African-American community here. Many historical landmarks and parts of two predominately African-American cemeteries were demolished. And now, those neighborhoods tend to be avoided as most people travel the main highway." Placement of the billboards on Route 52 thus symbolized Dill's attempt to bridge all aspects of the community, regardless of age, gender, race, or social status.

During the sixteen months of her residency, Dill made numerous visits to the Winston-Salem area. In her initial research, she discovered that the Moravians, some of the



earliest settlers of this area, had long encouraged expressive "shouting" in their religious ceremonies. As historian and author Ann Taves explains, "Shouting is an interactive act" involving "weeping, crying out, falling to the ground, and shouting for joy. Shouters presuppose a bodily knowledge, derived from the African performance tradition, which insisted that the presence and power of God (Spirit) was most fully realized in the dynamic interaction of the group." In the United States, the Moravians shared the tradition of shouting with many other religious groups (such as the Shouting Methodists or the Separate Baptists). The earliest known records of this type of activity in the United States date back to the interracial revivals and camp meetings held in various regions in Virginia and the Carolinas in the late 1700s.

Although this call-and-response singing seems to be fading from favor, the heartfelt songs sung in this tradition marry the rhythm of the syncopated beat with stories and texts rooted in the history of oppression. In the slave fields of the South, where they originated, these songs were full of hidden meaning and hope. The songs were used to lift the spirits high and help the singers persevere.

When the choir sings today, using hand claps and foot tapping as their source of percussion, that history still has a voice, a voice that struck Dill firmly in the gut. In planning the *Tongues of Fire* opening night Spiritual Sing, Dill wanted that same physical-gut sensation to occur in those that participated in the event. According to Dill, "What's wonderful, and perhaps historical, is that the spiritual choir will be singing

ecstasy, visions, radiance, pull, blood..

It was Dill's fascination with this bit of history that led her to Emmanuel Baptist Church and Reverend John Mendez, who was to become Dill's friend and mentor. Mendez is the man featured on the *My Name Was Called* billboard. Guided by Mendez, the congregation of Emmanuel Baptist Church opened their hearts to Dill. Never judging her intentions, they offered consistent praise and support. Their belief in the wonders of the spirit through its many manifestations resonated with Dill's investigation of the relationships between mysticism and spirituality, tolerance and individuality.

Collaborating with Emmanuel's Spiritual Choir, Dill expanded the spiritual choir's repertoire by writing new lyrics derived from the collected visionary stories. The history of the *a cappella* call-and-response choir and Dill's involvement with it became the subject of a documentary film by Steven Jones and students from the North Carolina School of the Art's School of Filmmaking. The essay by Terri Dowell-Dennis in the exhibition catalogue describes the special interaction between Dill and the choir.

into being the visions of an entire cross section of the Winston-Salem community. So this African-American tradition is folding into itself this language, and making it live through sacred song."

The use of language through its poetic, visual and physical manifestations has been paramount in informing Dill's work over the last decade. As Nancy Princenthal explains in her essay, Dill has always taken as her inspiration images from visionary poetry. Speaking to this, Dill explains, "I try to intermingle the image and the language so that the experience and the explanation are at the same time wedded and contrary. For me, the images usually rise up urgently and fully formed. They are like spontaneous, unasked for, visions in response to language and human beings."

Dill believes that when we are born, our bodies are filled with all of the words that we will ever use, and that as we get older, we get lighter and filled with light. In her work *Dot Girls*, we witness this outpouring effect. *Dot Girls* is an ephemeral work where bodies tend to disintegrate. It was inspired by the vision statement, "I had a dream I melted into nothingness." In *Dot Girls*, hundreds of small circular bits of ink-stained paper emanate outward from a center of what appears to be two figures made of the same material, often sharing some of the same particles. This drifting, parting of the body into molecular specks refers to the glorious feelings of emotional and physical dissolve one enjoys in ecstatic moments.

Dill is particularly interested in exploring how a culture's religious practices and beliefs are wedded to their linguistic and oral traditions. In her sculpture *Hindi Girl with Kafka*, for



example, Dill has cast three floating clothed figures without any outer extremities – except for legs and feet extending from the middle figure. The figures are literally covered with words, for their clothing is made of layers of pages from a Hindi newspaper emblazoned with a quotation from Kafka: "Felt as if the way were opened to the unknown nourishment." Dill explains, "We are all clothed in words. It refers here to what do you read, what do you see, and what do you hear?" Like a floating form of the multi-figured Indian deity Shiva, the three figures also represent the many sides of one person – public, private, and sacred.

For the work *Word Fall*, Dill worked with associate professor of art Kim Varnedoe and a group of art students from Salem College, a traditionally all-women's school in Winston-Salem. *Word Fall* is an elaboration of Dill's 1991 work *The White Wall of Wonder*, created in India with the assistance of seven Indian women who painstakingly hand cut long panels of cloth into a waterfall of words. In *Word Fall*, over 200 long strands of hand-cut words flow to the ground, weighted by gravity. These curled strands of paper slightly conceal the letters, then the words: ecstasy, visions, radiance, pull, blood. Like the reciting of a mantra, the soothing repetitive flow of the words generates new meaning each time they are seen. "The power of language to affect as private murmur is so varied and complex. I find I often use the same language over and over again, and for me, it always seems to mean something different, and something is learned. Something is learned in relation to emotion and words and objects," says Dill.

In the sculpture *I Was Born with a Veil*, Dill duplicates the title of one of her large banner-like panels yet incorporates different materials to tell another story. Three small busts cast from the artists' body float on the wall. Inked-stained paper leaves fall from the face, each stamped with a word from the title. The leaves might be those mentioned in Dill's vision – her veil, if you will.

Dill has always been body conscious, keenly aware of how we perceive our bodies, how we treat them, and how we hide from them. Art historian and performance artist Joanna Frueh points out that "body consciousness comes from thinking about the body as a base of knowledge and using it as such." But Dill blends her knowledge of the body with the power and communicative qualities of words. She perceives words as the body's armor, its clothing, our protector. At times she paints words directly on the naked form, making us privy to the body's interior, its essence. Sometimes she licks the words off, perhaps as a form of release or erasure.

Besides the eyes, our hands are one the most expressive parts of our bodies. Among other things, we talk with our hands; use them to write, type, point, caress, and fight. Physically, they connect us to other people. Hand imagery is

a recurring theme in Dill's work. In *It Is the Return of Desire*, a small, pointing cast hand sits high on the wall. The hand's pointing finger is elongated and covered with a roll of bright red words that fall to the ground. Much like a whisper of a secret, the words, upon close inspection, reveal the title. In *Poem Gloves (He Fumbles at Your Soul)*, a pair of gloves point down, pulled by the weight of the words that exit the fingertips. Seen through the sheerness of the material, words also line the interior of the gloves. The dangling words hang like prayer beads or fields of energy.

Language is the body's way of releasing thoughts and words into the world for others to grasp, and respond to. Sound is the force by which this language is released, be it whisper, blabber, or joyous song. In *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy*, Dill harnesses all of these elements to celebrate some simple acts that connect us all. The words, language, and images she chooses were provided by hundreds of collaborators who offered Dill the opportunity to share life's moments of little bliss and splendid rapture.

Dill's project suggests larger issues: the question of contemporary art's role in spiritualism; the differences between the spiritual world of organized religion and the mystical revelations of the individual; how language affects perception, to name a few, but these are for others to tackle. In the end, *Tongues on Fire: Visions and Ecstasy* is but one bridge, one moment in time where we set aside our differences and forge a common bond.

David J. Brown is the senior curator at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

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CHARLESTON as the HOLY CITY

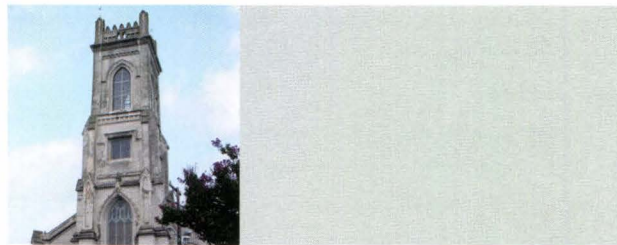
a multi-century development

THROUGHOUT its history, Charleston has been viewed as religiously tolerant, but the term "Holy City" is not necessarily related to an unusually devout population. The story of this unique moniker begins with the religious freedoms promoted by Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper in the early 17th century and culminates with the rise of 20th century cultural tourism.

During the 17th, century Charleston, a raucous port city, attracted religious dissenters from the European continent as well as New England. In 1669, John Locke drafted the Fundamental Carolina Constitution specifically acknowledging the religious tolerance to be adopted by the colony, which at this time included both North and South Carolina. Locke, a philosopher, served as secretary to Lord Ashley, a colonial proprietor under Charles II of England and a Charleston resident.

By 1740, religious dissenters, defined as those not faithful to the Anglican Church of England, comprised half of Charleston's population. This group included Presbyterians, Congregationalists, French Huguenots, Baptists, and Quakers. As early as 1704, all of these denominations, excluding the Presbyterians, established their own parishes. Until 1731, these four churches and the Anglican Church, St. Phillip's, were the only religious institutions on the Charleston peninsula.

The next twenty years saw the construction of three more religious institutions – Presbyterian, Lutheran, and



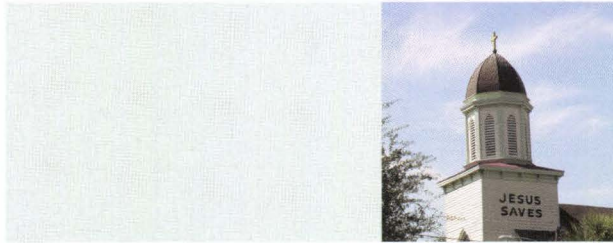
Jewish - augmenting the already diverse religious climate. By 1751, St. Phillip's congregation became so large that a new church, St. Michael's, was built to house the growing number of Anglican worshippers. Charleston's religious environment during the mid-18th century is best described as a collection of faiths, differing in religious principles, yet existing side by side.

Despite their differences, Charleston's pious were, as William Gerard de Brahm, a successful colonial land



surveyor in Charleston, recounted in 1772, "renound for concord, compleasance, courteousness, and tenderness towards each other, and more so towards foreigners, without regard or respect of nations or religion."*(sic)*¹ Throughout the remainder of the 18th and through the 20th century additional faiths established institutions, and numerous parishes grew so large they divided into subsidiary institutions.





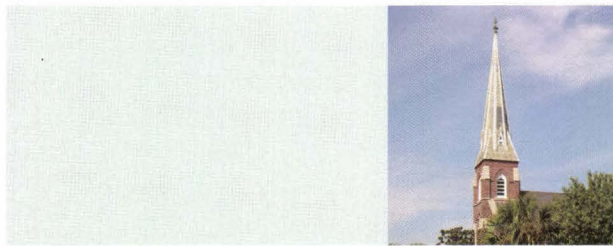
Nina Bozicnik, exhibition intern, is a double-major in art history and arts management at the College of Charleston.

1. Jacoby, Mary, ed., *The Churches of Charleston and the Lowcountry* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), p.5
2. *Ibid*, p.67.
3. Charleston Millennium Celebration, December 31, 1999 - January 1, 2000, <http://www.ci.charleston.sc.us/millennium.html>

In 1785, the Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury came to Charleston to reform what he saw as the city's indulgent society. Bishop Asbury even labeled it the "Sodom of the South."² Ultimately, Charleston's religious tolerance during the 17th and 18th centuries may not have translated into a pious citizenry.

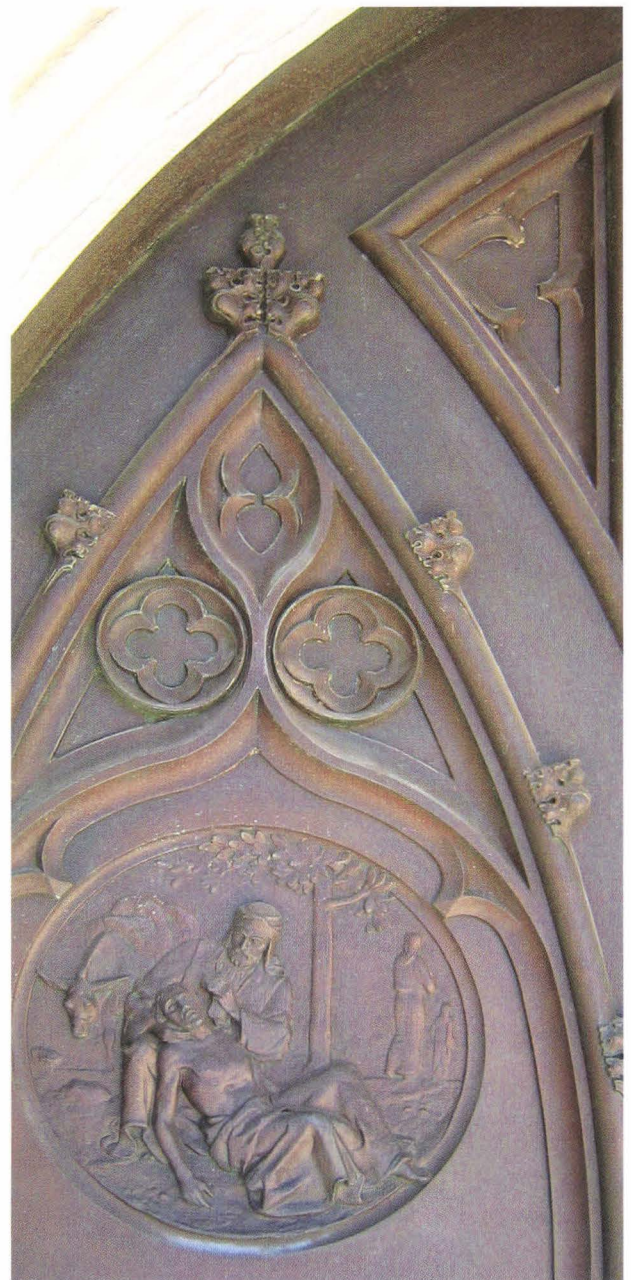
Today, Charleston's landscape is dotted with religious edifices ranging from magnificent cathedrals to modest contemporary places of worship. The term "Holy City" came into regular, verbal use in the 20th century as the city's unique architectural history was preserved through the historic preservation movement, and then commercialized to meet the demanding needs of the tourism industry. There are over sixty religious institutions on the southern peninsula, of which more than two thirds are Christian affiliated. The concentration of steeples inundates every approaching visitor's line of sight.

Attitudes of religious tolerance and acceptance, instated since the Carolina colony's birth continues today. One



recent millennium goal adopted by the Charleston City Council desires to "create mutual understanding among people with diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds."³

The history of Charleston as the "Holy City" may be viewed as one of speculation and deduction, and the term may be more abstract than concrete. It is clear that an environment of religious tolerance and the abundance of ecclesiastical architecture factored greatly into the coining of the phrase that now defines this magnificent city.



APPALACHIAN VALUES and RELIGION

MOUNTAIN people are religious. This does not mean that we always go to church regularly, but we are religious in the sense that most of our values and the meaning we find in life spring from the Bible. To understand mountaineers, one must understand our religion.

In the beginning, they were mostly Anglicans, Presbyterians or Baptists, with some Brethren and Lutherans, all rather formally organized churches with confessions of faith and other creedal documents. Presbyterian and Anglican churches did not serve the spiritual needs of all on the frontier, however, and so locally autonomous groups were formed, depending on local resources and leadership. The Methodists rose to prominence in the First Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, stressing the work of the Holy Spirit on human emotions, along with intellectual ideas. The Second Great Awakening, beginning in 1801 in Kentucky, won many Presbyterians and Calvinistic Baptists over to the belief that all who seek the Lord can be saved, not just the limited group that John Calvin said were predestined to be saved. Several churches split over the doctrines of predestination and free-will. Here is a story:

Free-Will Baptist and a Predestinarian Baptist were good friends. One day they went to the courthouse together. As they were coming down stairs from the second floor, the Predestinarian tripped and fell down the stairs, rolling end over end, tearing his suit and bruising himself all over. The Free-Willer rushed down, picked him up, brushed him off and asked how he was. "Well, I think I'm all right," the man said. The Free-Willer said, "But I guess you're glad to get that one behind you, aren't you?"

Mountain people in large numbers joined the more optimistic Methodist and Free-Will Baptist churches, churches created to an extent by and for the common people. The members depended on the grace of God to help them

through a hard world and to save them in the end, even though they at times were weak and sinful. Eventually, other churches grew up in the mountains to meet the needs of isolated people: Cumberland Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ, and the Pentecostal-Holiness movement at the turn of the twentieth century added many others, the last group going beyond the Methodists in stressing holiness and the work of grace from the Holy Spirit.

The home mission boards of the mainline denominations have usually looked on our locally autonomous churches as something that we must be saved from. Thus they have sent many missionaries to us, even if we thought we were already secure in the Lord. Many social reformers have also viewed the local church negatively as a hindrance to social progress, since native Christians sometimes have a dim view of human perfectibility. What such outside observers fail to see is that our religion has helped to sustain us and has made life meaningful in grim situations. Religion has shaped our lives, but at the same time we have shaped our religion, since religion and culture are always intertwined. Life in the mountains until recently did not allow for an optimistic social gospel. Hard work did not always bring a sure reward, and so perhaps some of mountain religion is more fatalistic than elsewhere. The point is to get religion – get saved – and try to keep the faith and endure, hoping for a sure reward in the hereafter. The beliefs are more realistic than idealistic, because we know what theologian Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out, that we see clearly what we should be and what we should do, and yet we fail consistently; that is the human tragedy. Someone said that man and woman were made at the end of the week when God was tired. The Good News is that even though we fail, God loves us anyway, and if we believe, we will be saved.

Loyal Jones is retired from his long-time position as the director of the Appalachian Center at Berea College. Jones is widely published on Appalachian life, values, religion, humor and music.

"Religion" from *Appalachian Values* is reprinted by permission from the Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1645 Winchester Ave., P.O. Box 669, Ashland, KY, 41105, 606-326-1667, www.jsfbooks.com

THE DIVINE CONVERSATION: traditions in sacred art

THE dialogue between art and the sacred is profound, global and age old. Evidence of this enduring relationship, in the form of artwork, adorns places of worship around the world and the spiritual sites of Charleston, South Carolina are no exception. Most religious institutions in Charleston (known as the Holy City) house a variety of artwork – paintings, sculpture, stained glass – that gives visual form to multiple perspectives on and experiences of the spiritual. At first glance, the relationship between religion and contemporary art may appear to be one of mutual disinterest and at times even estrangement. On closer inspection, the depth of the conversation between art and spirituality, which is as old as time, continues today, both around the world and in our own backyard, in the sacred spaces of Charleston.

Through the ages, artists have attempted to capture the essence of the spiritual, the unseen – an element at the heart of most religious traditions. Tracing the history of art from civilizations around the world reveals much about attitudes toward the sacred. Representations of the Buddha and of Hindu gods, as well as magnificent temples and shrines serve as artifacts of Asian spiritual traditions in countries such as India, China, Tibet, and Japan. The art and architecture of early indigenous American civilizations, such as the Mayan, live on in the ruins of temples, tombs, and palaces adorned with sophisticated artistic expressions of complex religious practice and ideology. The great pyramids of Egypt remain as symbols of ancient Egyptian society's obsession with immortality. With the spread of Islam in the Middle East and beyond, the tradition of creating extraordinary architecture with spiritual purposes and to memorialize the dead continued with the production of mosques and mausoleums – the most famous example being the Taj Mahal in India. In many parts of the world, art remains essential to spiritual



St. Michael & St. Gabriel
Lamb's Chapel
1919

practice, as in the use of traditional masks and costumes for ritual performance in Africa.

In Western European art history too, there is an ongoing connection between the arts and religion. At times, the creation of art has specifically served religious purposes. Following the state's dominance in artistic production during the Roman Empire through the third century AD, the early Christian church in Western Europe quickly grasped that art in many forms – architecture, illuminated manuscripts, mosaics, frescos, paintings, stained glass, and sculpture – was an excellent vehicle for transmitting and spreading its message. Representations of the Madonna, Christ and the saints became ubiquitous, and Gothic architecture's sacred spaces, which by their very design encourage congregants to literally look heavenward, were essential elements in the growth of the church. For many, the culmination of the relationship between art and Christianity is found in Michelangelo's High Renaissance work – the frescos of the

Sistine Chapel, which, in an overwhelming array of twisting figures, illustrate the biblical story of the creation, fall, and redemption of man.

After the Renaissance the link between religion and western art grew more complicated, ambiguous and individualized. Baroque masters from the early 17th century, like Caravaggio and Peter Paul Rubens, often focused on religious subject matter but presented it in a theatrically passionate manner; the sensuality of the figures often takes precedence over the message. Eventually artists in the 19th and early 20th centuries became more concerned with the ideas, styles, and subjects of their rapidly changing times, and less concerned with religious tradition. Generally modern art's relationship to religion was more contentious, as artists questioned, challenged and dissected tradition while also searching for new representations of spirituality and transcendence. Examples of this search are found in the work of mid-twentieth century abstract expressionists like Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Clifford Still. In the latter part of the 20th century, artists' work often expresses a critical voice – pointing out inconsistencies, ironies, and irrelevancies in religious practice, thought, and tradition. To this day, many artists continue to find spirituality and religion rich sources of inspiration.

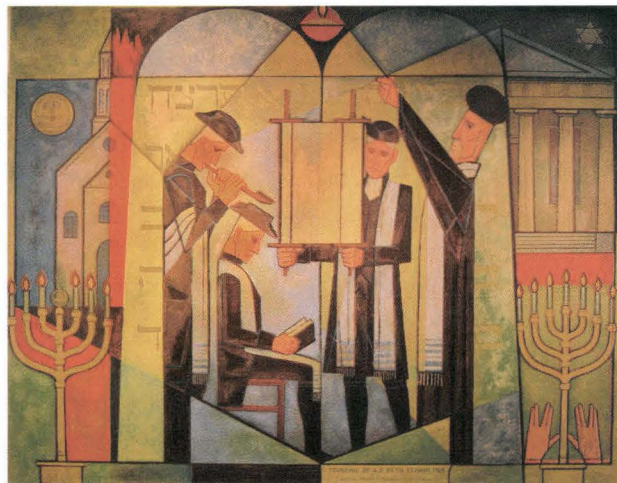
The sacred spaces of Charleston hold unique examples of the continuing conversation between art and religion. Despite their adherence to different faiths, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, the first Reform Jewish congregation in the U.S., founded in 1749, and St. Mary of the Annunciation, a catholic church founded in 1789, have two things in common. First, they inhabit the same block of Hasell Street between Meeting and King Streets in the heart of downtown Charleston. Second, they each have figurative paintings on their walls created by artists well-known in their day, though the works are as different in style and subject matter as the institutions that house them.

In 1814, John Stevens Cogdell, a native Charlestonian and house representative, presented his *Crucifixion* painting to the congregation of St. Mary's. The life-size, realistic painting shows Jesus on the cross and is applied to the wall directly above the altar, creating a striking focal point in the beautiful and intimate sanctuary. The present piece is not the original 1814 work; a fire in 1838 wreaked havoc on St. Mary's and, unfortunately, attempts to salvage the painting ultimately left it damaged. Applying the skills he learned while studying in Italy, Cogdell was able to restore the painting in 1839. *Christ in the Garden*, a stylistically similar painting by Cogdell, hangs in St. Luke's Chapel on Ashley Avenue. It is interesting to note that Cogdell, a Protestant, presented the *Crucifixion* to a Catholic congregation. The gift may have resulted from the artist's friendship with Samuel F.B. Morse, a noted Charleston

artist and inventor. Morse was a member of St. Mary's and must have had great respect for Cogdell. Whether or not this is the reason, Cogdell's *Crucifixion* is a powerful representation of Christ's death and a significant contribution to Charleston's religious art and history.

In 1950, one of Charleston's foremost modern artists, William Halsey, painted two works on canvas for Beth Elohim, commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas J. Tobias for the Bicentennial Anniversary of the Jews of Charleston. *Patriots of Beth Elohim* immortalizes Jewish war heroes of the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and 20th century wars. The sister painting, *Founding of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim*, illustrates the synagogue's inception as a Jewish Reform institution. Each canvas mural measures eight feet tall by ten feet wide and recently underwent restorative cleaning. Both works are representative of Halsey's distinct abstract style, and effectively communicate Beth Elohim's heritage and history.

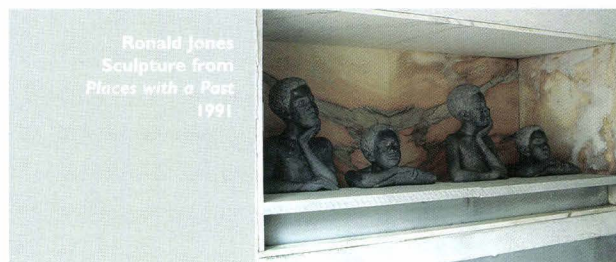
Stained glass has been a traditional element of Christian church ornamentation since the 14th century. In 1883, the Reverend Anthony Toomer Porter, while converting an existing building into what would eventually become St. Luke's Chapel at the Medical University of South Carolina, commissioned a stained glass window in memory of his young son, who died at age ten. In the early 20th century,



William Halsey
Founding of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim
1950

St. Luke's added two large stained glass windows on its north side. These windows depict St. Michael and St. Gabriel, respectively, and are thought to have been produced in the studio of Henry Wynd Young of New York. As stated in the church's informational brochure, the windows were financed by the, "Patrons of 1918-1919 in thankful remembrance that no Boy died during the Influenza Epidemic of that year." When Hurricane Hugo nearly demolished the structure in

1989, the university, public and private organizations; and independent individuals collectively worked to restore the chapel. The Shenandoah Stained Glass Studio of Front Royal, Virginia successfully restored the stained glass windows, utilizing as much of the original glass as possible. Additionally, a small stained glass window with a stylized image of Hurricane Hugo was installed next to the southeast door. The picturesque chapel, which is open daily, serves as a resource for the students, faculty and staff of the Medical University and is a popular site for weddings.



Although artwork found in religious institutions is often spiritual in nature, work with political and social overtones can also be found in Charleston. The contemporary artist Ronald Jones creates art with a purpose. In 1991, Jones' purpose was to commemorate Denmark Vesey and his historic relevance to the African-American struggle for equality. Jones created a black marble statue of two boys and installed the work at Emanuel AME Church on Calhoun Street as part of the Spoleto Festival exhibition *Places with a Past*. Denmark Vesey belonged to an African Methodist Episcopal congregation, one of three in Charleston founded in 1817; the AME church historically provided African Americans a free and equal place of worship. In 1821, white Charlestonians became increasingly suspicious of abolitionist activity within the AME denomination. Vesey's church was subsequently burned, and, in 1822 he died after leading a rebellion. Almost two centuries later, Jones set out to immortalize this struggle. He fashioned his statues after a photograph taken by George N. Barnard in 1874 of two black boys, representing the first generation of African Americans to live with freedom in the United States. The Reverend John H. Gillison of Emanuel AME Church, the present church of Vesey's former congregation, supported the artist's vision, and together with the church's board of trustees, approved the installation of Jones' sculpture in a gated alcove beneath the steps to the sanctuary.

Another contemporary work created as part of a 1997 Spoleto exhibition is a piece by Martha Jackson-Jarvis located in the churchyard of St. Luke's Reformed Episcopal Church on Nassau Street. This outdoor sculpture, entitled *Rice, Rattlesnakes, and Rainwater*, was commissioned for the exhibition *Human/Nature: Art and Landscape in Charleston and*

the Low Country. The piece, inspired by Afro-Caribbean spiritual traditions brought to the low country by slaves, features four mosaic rain barrels with ceramic fish attached and two house-like structures covered in ceramic and oyster shell mosaics, featuring mosquitoes, rice plants and fish. Embedded in the center of the oyster shell pathway between the structures is a mosaic rattlesnake, and surrounding the entire garden is a iron fence including West African symbols and iron bottle trees at the corners offering protection from evil spirits. The imagery and materials in the piece pay homage to low country African-American spiritual and cultural traditions.

All of the works mentioned here are in spaces open and available to the public. St. Mary of the Annunciation is located at 89 Hasell Street and is open Monday – Friday from 10 am to 3 pm. Congregation Beth Elohim is located at 86 Hasell Street, directly across from St. Mary's, and is open Monday-Friday from 10 am to 4 pm. St. Luke's Chapel is on the corner of Bee Street and Ashley Avenue and is open Monday-Friday, 9 am to 1 pm. Ronald Jones' sculpture can be viewed at any time, outside the street-level gate, at the foot of the steps to Emanuel AME Church at 110 Calhoun Street, near the corner of Meeting and Calhoun Streets. The garden by Martha Jackson Jarvis can be seen in the churchyard next to St. Luke's Reformed Episcopal Church at 60 Nassau St. In addition to these works of art, there are many more remarkable pieces to be found in Charleston's other religious institutions, which number close to seventy sites on the Charleston peninsula. Each of these works is sure to have a captivating story to tell in the divine, ongoing conversation between art and religion.



Lori Kornegay is a visiting assistant professor in the arts management program in the School of the Arts at the College of Charleston, and serves as exhibition coordinator for Thresholds: Expressions of Art and Spiritual Life.

Nina Bozicnik, exhibition intern, is a double-major in art history and arts management at the College of Charleston

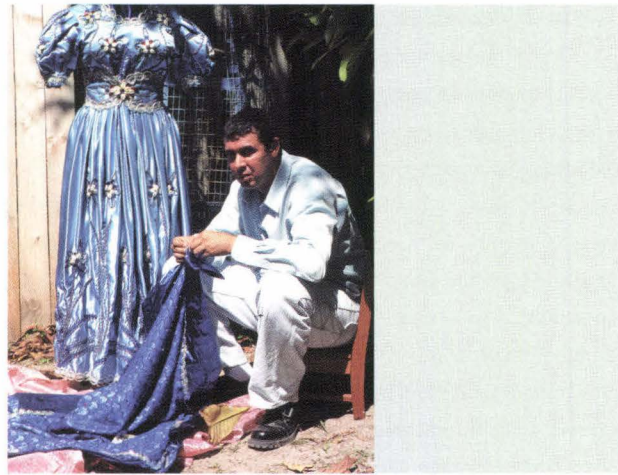
FOLK RELIGION in FLORIDA

altars and icons

RELIGION is an arena of community life particularly rich in traditional arts. All formal religions include rituals, material culture, music, celebrations, and beliefs that are maintained and communicated outside official church doctrine. Moreover, some religions are based wholly upon beliefs and customs learned orally or through example from other members of the faith. Both types of traditional religious belief and practice are considered folk religion. Material objects are often important components of celebratory practices.

The Orisha religion, also known as *Santería*, is the Afro-Cuban folk religion practiced by an estimated 100,000 Cubans and others in south and central Florida. It is based primarily on Yoruba religious practices brought to Cuba by West Africans. A variety of factors encouraged the preservation of many African religious elements, so that features such as divination, the use of stones, herbs, sacrifices, and the Yoruba language (*Lucumí*) have remained much the same as the religion still practiced in Nigeria. However, contact with Catholicism has also had a strong influence on the religion. During the slavery era, people of African descent had to profess Catholicism to qualify for freedom, so many religious practices were hidden behind a Christian veneer. For instance, deities are called by the Spanish term *santos* (saints) as well as by the Yoruba *orishas*, since each orisha was identified with a Catholic saint on the basis of similar characteristics. Practitioners strive to live their lives in harmony with the orishas, other people, and the environment. A complex hierarchy of priests guides the actions of the devout by teaching them the tenets of the religion and revealing the wisdom of the orishas through divination.

A wide variety of material culture accompanies the practice of the religion. Many objects are important to devotional activities, and specialists in ritual arts, such as



metalworkers, woodcarvers, altar makers, beadworkers, tailors/seamstresses, and others, are important for Miami's Orisha community. They must not only understand the aesthetic preferences of individual orishas and know how to please the deities, but also must please both the priesthood and community with their products.

Eusebio Escobar is an exceptional artist in the media of both Orisha altars and *ropa de santo* (ritual clothing). As a child in Pinar del Río, Cuba, Escobar's painter grandfather recognized his talent and supplied him with paints and lessons. His grandfather suggested further study. Escobar eventually entered art school and the university, where he studied sculpture, wood, and crafts in addition to a regular course of studies. After working first as a commercial painter and then decorating shop windows, he learned to sew with his grandmother's help. He soon found employment at an atelier for wedding clothes, first designing and then sewing. Since the pay was too little to live on, Escobar began designing cabaret costumes in 1986. He found the work fascinating because it did not limit his imagination in terms of

They must...understand the aesthetic preferences of individual *orishas* and...please the deities

colors and textiles. He worked there for about four years, and every six months he would create a new body of costumes, recycling the same materials.

Escobar came to the U.S. and initially settled in Las Vegas through the sponsorship of a church. He especially loved the vibrant city lights, which seemed dreamlike after the constant electricity shortages and blackouts in Cuba. Although he wanted to work with the theaters, he was unfamiliar with ways to acquire work within that system so he volunteered with the Catholic Church to translate for other recent immigrants. Soon after Escobar moved to Miami in 1996, he became involved in the Orisha religion. He found a mentor and studied with the late Victor Migans, who taught *ropa de santo* traditions. Escobar notes that American *ropa de santo* styles and colors are similar to those in Cuba, but materials are far better since Cuba experiences chronic shortages. Perhaps because of the greater range and availability of materials combined with the more affluent many *ropa de santo* styles have evolved significantly in Miami in recent decades.

Today Escobar makes his living creating *ropa de santo* and altars for religious ceremonies in Miami and in other American cities. The type of *ropa de santo* that Escobar makes depends on the primary *orisha* of the individual for whom it is made. Male *orisha* garments usually consist of pants, vest or short coat and hats or crowns, while female *ropa de santo* includes an elaborate dress, headdress, and jewelry. If a man's *orisha* is *orisha*, he modifies the outfit to include pants. However, a woman with a male *orisha* will wear the deity's pants. Some *ropa de santo* styles may be derived from traditional Afro-Cuban dress, such as women's tiered gingham skirts, though others are based on African apparel. Escobar makes the garments from beautiful, expensive fabrics in colors associated with the initiate's principal *orisha*, and often embroiders or beads them in symbols associated with that deity. The result is extraordi-

narily beautiful works of art. Escobar explains that the initiated wear their ritual clothing only three times: "People wear them when they 'make a saint' or become initiated, when they are presented to the drums, and when they die."

Escobar creates several types of garments for different ceremonial contexts. For example, novices wear two sets of clothing on the second day of an initiation – the *traje del almuerzo* (lunch outfit) and the *traje de gala* (coronation outfit). The first is made of humble fabrics like gingham or burlap, while the coronation outfit is an elaborate showpiece completed with a regal crown. Another example of *ropa de santo* is the *traje de baile* (dance outfit) made for the person who will be possessed by the honored *orisha* at a celebration. When he sees a piece of *ropa de santo*, Escobar is able to identify the artist through his or her individual style. He finds that other specialists rarely break with well-established patterns and color schemes. Whether it is his art and design background or just his natural creative impulse, Escobar constantly expands the parameters of the tradition and creates innovative pieces that are esteemed within his community.

Practitioners of the Orisha religion create altars dedicated to deities for special religious occasions. Known as "thrones," these sacred spaces have become particularly elaborate in Miami, and involve coordination of materials, objects, symbols and colors associated with the honored deity. Although individuals usually create the altars in their homes, ritual specialists, such as Escobar, are often hired to build thrones for one of several types of special ceremonies. There are several different types of thrones – those for consecrations (initiations into the priesthood), observances (the annual anniversaries of initiation), and rituals (i.e., when an oracle instructs a priest to perform a particular ceremony). Offerings such as fruits, pastries, breads and other items are usually contained in ritual and observance thrones. At the end of the ceremony, the foods are infused

with divine energy and are distributed to those attending the event. Escobar's altars are visually stunning and symbolically rich assemblages of objects associated with the honored orisha, framed by dazzling fabric canopies.

Escobar has proved himself a capable artist not only through pleasing the Orisha community, but also through exhibitions of his work in *At the Crossroads: Afro-Cuban Orisha Arts* in Miami at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida and at the Florida Folk Festival. In spite of the economic uncertainties inherent in working as a free-lance artist, Escobar prides himself on never turning away a client for insufficient money and in putting more into his work than required. Although he must deal with both the religious and business aspects of his occupation, he feels strongly that the religious significance is both primary and priceless.

IN Florida, Greek communities maintain their rich cultural heritage through strong ties to family, the Greek Orthodox Church, and a variety of other social institutions. Greek Floridians maintain many traditional arts that have a close relationship to family and religion—the areas of greatest cultural conservatism. Many of the arts associated with the Greek Orthodox Church were initially developed during the days of the Byzantine Empire. Whether expressed through iconography, architecture, chanting, vestments, or ritual movements, beauty in the expression of the divine is still an important aspect of the Orthodox liturgy. In particular, Byzantine painting as represented in iconography suggests the existence of a timeless supernatural realm through a synthesis of abstract and naturalistic styles.

Florida is lucky to include several respected Orthodox iconographers among its citizens, including Elias Damianakis of New Port Richey. Although he was born on Long Island in 1966, Damianakis' father was from Athens and his mother from the island of Lesbos. As a child and young adult he was very active in Orthodox Church youth groups, dance troupes, and other cultural activities in his community. Damianakis also recalls that he was always interested in art. After high school he attended the Fashion Institute of Technology and worked as a fashion illustrator. However, he did not like the fast-paced lifestyle, and sought a more spiritual basis for his life.

Damianakis traveled to Greece, where he spent eight months studying classical and Minoan art styles, and there discovered Byzantine art. He then undertook twelve years of

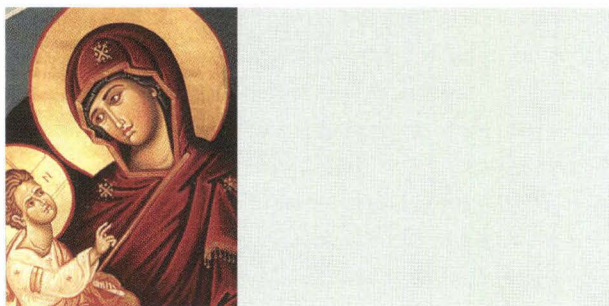
apprenticeship in iconography styles and skills with master iconographers in Crete, Athens, and New York before beginning to work on his own. Among his teachers was George Filippakis of Woodbury, NY, considered by many to be the best Greek Orthodox iconographer in the United States. In Greece, he also studied with students of the great modern Greek iconographers Fotios Kontoglou and Kartakes.

Greek families usually display small, portable icons in the private areas of the home. In contrast, Greek Orthodox churches display icons on walls, on the *proskynetarion* – the stand that holds the day's icon, on the *iconostasis* – the screen that separates the chancel from the nave, and on many other surfaces. In fact, beginning in the 9th century, church shapes and interior surfaces were designed to reflect a symbolic representation of the cosmos. The following is a description of the established arrangement of images in the church:

Portrayed against a field of gold suggestive of heaven and eternity, Christ Pantocrator, the Almighty, looked down upon His world from the central dome. Below Him, extending into the drum of the dome, were angels and prophets, His attendants and witnesses. In the quarter-sphere of the main apse, midway between the dome and ground level, was the Theotokos [Virgin], Birth-giver of God, placed there as the link between heaven and earth. Below her, on the apsidal wall but visible over the altar, figured the Communion of the Apostles, exemplar of the Eucharist, with Christ as the priest and angels as acolytes. Lower than the dome but on the upper level was the Feast cycle, comprising major scenes from the life of Christ (such as the Annunciation, Nativity, Presentation in the Temple, Baptism) and one devoted to the Theotokos, her Dormition (*Koimesis*). These scenes not only recapitulated the Church year but also formed a collective image of the Holy Land. On the lower wall surfaces were frontal figures of saints, celestial counterparts of the assembled worshippers.

(Yiannias)

An essential Orthodox belief is that the icon is a vehicle



of divine power and grace. Orthodox tradition has fixed many features in the depiction of the saints and holy family so that the relationship between the prototype and recurring images would not be lost. Although artists do not duplicate exactly the same colors, composition, or shapes of other icons, it is understood that changes must be related to the significance of the subject. This requires an artist who has a deep understanding of church doctrine and will not manipulate images sheerly for personal taste. Thus, creating an icon is a spiritual as well as a creative undertaking. Before and

and sands many times. For large images, such as those on church domes, Damianakis completes the icons in his workshop, working on cotton or linen canvas covered with three coats of sanded gesso. When finished, he then rolls up the images and takes them to the church. There he trims away the excess canvas, then glues them onto the surface of the wall or ceiling with a heavy clay-based adhesive paste.

Damianakis creates his own egg tempura paints each day by grinding fine quality color pigments from around the world and mixing them with raw egg yolk. In this way, he is able to

I keep my mind clear and simple...as I'm praying,
I'm writing the icon. For me, it's a ministry.

during the process of painting, Damianakis prays, meditates, and fasts. He states, "I keep my mind clear and simple. Always in continuous prayer: As I'm praying, I'm writing the icon. For me, it's a ministry." (Lieb)

Despite established prototypes, there have been periodic and regional variations in style throughout the history of iconography. About his style, Damianakis explains, "When I am asked what style I work in, I usually reply 'Byzantine.' I am mostly influenced by the Macedonian School, however many elements also strongly lean towards the Cretan and Russian Schools. My personal preference is the folk style of the Aegean Islands which is traditionally considered to have been founded in Constantinople...." (Damianakis) While Damianakis adheres to Orthodox standards in creating portable icons, wall murals, frescos, and Byzantine window design, he infuses his painting with a warm personal style. When asked if he feels stifled by strict guidelines, he compares it to an orchestra playing a composition – many orchestras may play the same piece but each will interpret it in a different way. Rather than feeling constrained, he feels free as an artist to develop a personal interpretation within the parameters.

In creating icons, Damianakis follows many traditional practices taught to him by master iconographers. He bases his portable icons on solid marine plywood, which he gessoes

achieve enduring and luminous colors that dry very hard onto the canvas. For many icons, the background or highlights are gilded with 23-karat gold leaf. While studying with the masters, Damianakis also learned how to make his own brushes-including the types of brushes to use, the type of hair needed, the places to collect the hair, and how to assemble the brushes.

In addition to creating icons, Damianakis cleans and restores them, paints frescos and wall murals, and creates mosaics. Despite his relative youth, his work graces churches in Florida, California, New York, Iowa, and Greece. They are also found in private collections in Florida, California, Greece, Georgia, New York, Illinois, and Canada. In 2001, Damianakis received a prestigious Florida Folk Arts Fellowship to continue his work.

Tina Bucuvalas, Ph.D., is State Folklorist with the Florida Folklife Program, Department of State, Tallahassee

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Damianakis, Elias. Interview with Robert L. Stone. New Port Richey, FL, October 22, 1999.
Escobar, Eusebio. Interview with Tina Bucuvalas, White Springs, FL, May 25, 2003.
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FLORIDA TRADITIONS

JEWISH people everywhere have retained a great many traditional arts associated with their religious and secular life. Among the many arts, which thrive in southeast Florida's large Jewish community is the *ketubah*, (plural *ketubot*), which is both a work of art and a legal contract. The *ketubah* originated as the official marriage record in towns and villages where Jews lived. Jewish law states that a man cannot live with a woman unless they have a contract, so these marriage contracts outline such marital obligations as the provision of money, property rights and conjugal relations. American *ketubot* may be written in both Hebrew and English calligraphy, often with a well-known saying gracing the top of the page. The *ketubah* artist consults with the bridal couple to choose an appropriate passage from the scriptures. The document is then illustrated with beautiful designs that have symbolic significance in Jewish culture (Bucuvalas and Zimny).

Eileen Brautman's journey to making *ketubot* began in the 1960s when she entered a contest for Polish paper cuts. The genre interested her because of her Polish Jewish family background. The delicately cut designs are often symmetrical and depict such images as birds, butterflies, flowers, trees, and angles. It was in the 1970s that she first thought about Judaic art and how making paper cuts related to Jewish wedding contracts. She explains that, "I had an inner need to make Judaic art but I didn't know it. I came to know it as part of my cultural tradition." She is quick to say that she probably never saw a *ketubah* as a child, but she had a longing to know more about her heritage since she has so few things from her ancestors. She laments, "We lost a generation. . . . The most beautiful object that we have is a brass menorah that was made in Poland in the 1880s that my grandparents brought to this country. So I really didn't come to the tradition through an art family, or through having objects, seeing them. But as an artist, I always have my eyes open." The menorah, a brass

candleholder, is often used as a symbol in her *ketubot*.

Brautman became involved in making *ketubot* when she discovered one in a gift shop. She read a short narrative about the artist, who was internationally known, and became inspired. Her house is not full of her artwork because, as she says, "I give them all away. [But] I don't feel like I've lost them. They are all part of me." This idea is further elaborated when she remarks, "Some time in the past I made a promise to draw people to me who are gone." She feels that her artwork continues the traditions of past generations, and this activity maintains their presence.

Each *ketubah* is different. Brautman puts pomegranates in many of the borders, since they symbolize fruitfulness. "There are 613 seeds in them," she explains. "This is a good number, representing the number of good, righteous things you are to do. It is also the number of fringes on a prayer



photo: Bud Lee

shawl." Showing off one of her pieces, she points out a crown, a Torah, and a bride and groom – who are considered royalty on their wedding day. There is also a goat and a fish,

which are zodiac signs. Others have lions and lionesses and columns. They are often lacy and baroque.

Each couple for whom Brautman creates a contract explains to her what they want. They discuss it with a rabbi

inches of it. Placed in the bedroom or the hallway to the bedroom, it is a frequent reminder of one's vows to keep a marriage healthy and strong. And the reminder is indeed aesthetically pleasing.

A traditional ketubah might explain how many sheep the bride brought into the marriage...

and the contract is finalized. She talks with them about a border design, then plays with images until a drawing pleases both her and the bride and groom. She places the final drawing on a light table so she can transfer the design to good paper and begin the cutwork. In the center, she inscribes the verbal contract in Hebrew, since traditional ketubot were originally written in Hebrew. Although Brautman attended Hebrew school, she says she cannot use it very well in conversation. It is easy enough for her to make beautiful letters with pen and ink since she practiced calligraphy before she began making ketubot.

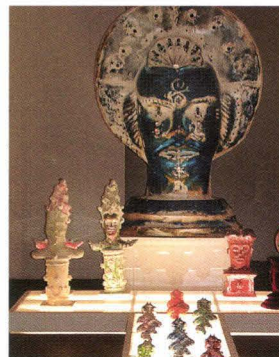
Learning the history of her art form is important to Brautman. She goes back to books to explain what she has learned. She knows, for example, that many people who had ketubot in the Renaissance were Orthodox. Even before the Renaissance, people used ketubot, but Brautman is not sure what they were called then. Ketubot styles vary greatly and there are many from Israel. In the document itself, the terms of the marriage were spelled out. A traditional ketubah might explain how many sheep the bride brought into the marriage or how many gold coins the groom had. If the marriage did not work out, everyone understood who had brought what into the marriage and, as carefully as possible, goods could be appropriately separated. The original ketubah was useful, therefore, in case of a divorce, even though there would not be divorces, as we know them today. "The groom," she says, "just put the bride out." Of course, she is quick to add, "modern ketubot and marriage contracts have their own way of doing things."

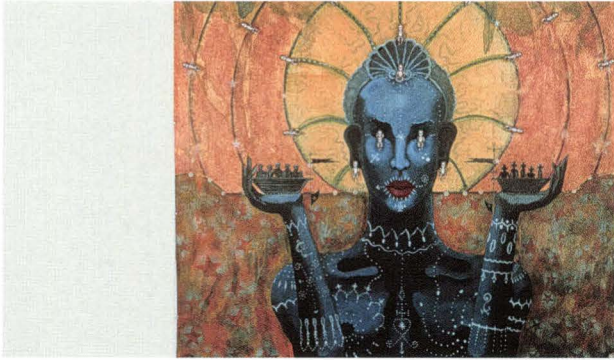
Looking at one of her exquisite contracts, one can only marvel at the time and attention it must take to create each

EDOUARD Duval Carrié's artwork, which comments on Haiti's history and socio-political realities, often focuses on the Vodou religion that is ever-present in Haiti's daily affairs (Poupeye 89). While he moves in the established so-called fine arts world, his work is clearly grounded in Haitian traditions. Born in Port-au Prince, when he was a child, his family was forced to relocate because of the violent Duvalier regime. They moved to Puerto Rico, where he learned to speak Spanish fluently.

In 1978, Duval Carrié received his BA degree in geography and urban studies from the University of Loyola Montreal in Quebec, Canada. It wasn't until 1988-89 that he was able to study art at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris. Duval Carrié also took classes at McGill University in Quebec and at the University of Montreal, also in Quebec. After his formal education, he lived in France for many years, then moved to Miami where he feels more at home. This is also where his artwork and reputation have flourished.

While Vodou is a secondary subject of many of Duval





Carrié's political paintings, some of his works focus directly on the religion. For example, a 1994 work titled *Ayida Wèdo* depicts spirits that come from West African traditions. The female divinity is the wife of Danbala, a serpent deity associated with water, the rainbow, and wisdom. *Ayida Wèdo*'s body is covered with religious markings called *vèvè* used to evoke the *lwa* or spirits. A snake arches from one hand to the next, perhaps representative of Danbala (Beauvoir-Dominique 154). The snake is ancient, and also suggests the continuity of generations. The palm tree by the female deity is a natural *pòto-mitan*, or sacred pole, placed in Vodou temples by which the *lwa* are said to arrive (Hayes and Robinson 30).

Although Duval Carrié's art often revolves around Haiti, he

the "boat people" who undertake the dangerous voyage to the United States on make-shift rafts.

But no matter what form his artwork takes, it is always narrative, and it is intended to make visible Haitian life. By telling the rest of the world about Haiti's culture and history, he insures the visibility of his island's ancestors, their beliefs, joys, and struggles. He explains that he is interested in aesthetics and styles of creating art, but this is not what best defines him. Rather, he says, his work is a "call to tolerance. There are people around who are different, they represent different things, [and] they have different gods."

In keeping with both Miami's and Haiti's tropical landscape and bold identity, his art is not subtle. Its colors and landscape are vivid, and unforgettable. And the characters he depicts are comical, tragic, and layered with meaning.

Like many artists in Florida, Duval Carrié's work reflects both his ethnic and geographic understandings. While he now moves easily in the "fine art" world, exhibiting in major museums, his work clearly reflects his cultural heritage, and it is grounded, like any folk artist, in his community and the everyday life experiences he feels important to make visible.

Kristin Congdon, Ph.D., is professor of Philosophy, Film and Digital Media at the University of Central Florida, Orlando.

Vodou is a secondary subject of many of (his) paintings...some focus directly on the religion

explains that he feels comfortable living in Miami because, he can "mingle locally with the Haitians. I didn't want to go back to Haiti because of the turmoil there." His concern for the safety and well-being of his two children is continuously on his mind. His involvement in the active Haitian political movement in Miami energizes him and his work. "So I'm becoming more a part of the cultural landscape" of Miami.

More recently, Duval Carrié's work has become more three-dimensional, and he has been creating large installations. He makes boats, for example, which tell the tales of

Beauvoir-Dominique, Rachel. "Underground Realms of Being: Vodoun Magic." *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*. Ed. Donald J. Cosentino. Los Angeles: University of California-Los Angeles Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995, pp. 152-179. Bucuvalas, Tina and Michael Zimny. "A Jewel for a People: The Sanford L. Ziff Museum of Florida." *Florida Heritage Magazine*, 5:3 (Summer 1997), pp. 20-22. Hayes, Anne Marie and Michelle Robinson. "Instructional Resources: Haitian Art: Exploring Cultural Identity." *Art Education* 54.1 (January 2001), pp. 25-32. Poupeye, Veerie. *Caribbean Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998.

Note: Unless otherwise cited, all information on Eileen Brautman comes from an interview on August 29, 1999, and follow-up correspondence for accuracy. Stephen Goranson assisted with clarity on the ketubah tradition. Similarly, unless otherwise noted, information on Edouard Duval Carrié comes from an interview on August 29, 2000 and some follow-up emails to check for accuracy.

AESTHETIC ATTRACTIONS

in houses of worship in historic charleston

EIGHT resolute havens of spiritual solace guard various precincts of South Carolina's coastal "grande dame," and these edifices have often served as intricately involved witnesses to, or participants in the history of one of America's oldest port cities. An octet of extraordinary places of worship in the city of Charleston has been selected to play an intrinsic role in the exhibition *Thresholds: Expressions of Art & Spiritual Life*. Many among this collection of aesthetically striking buildings, as survivors of fire, flood, earthquake, hurricane and war, are in fact welded to the identity of this exceptional place, and the diversity of unique churches, synagogues and chapels, established on this venerable site, document important aspects of the mercurial history of South Carolina's "Holy City."

Whereas the artists of the *Thresholds* exhibition have introduced new visions into the contexts of these varied spiritual environments, the structures *per se*, and the decoration of their respective interiors, serve not as a mere "backdrop" but collaborate equally as partners in creating a distinctive aesthetic experience. Indeed, several of the houses of worship included here are well-recognized treasures of American architecture in their own right in addition to having a rich or an unusual history. Looking at either their most striking aesthetic details or their contextual importance – or both – will be the work of this brief consideration of the selected significant sites participating in *Thresholds*.

In approaching such a collection of structures of historic significance a facile hierarchy may be established through reliance upon a rough chronological ordering, and based upon the imposition of this logical protocol, our consideration of a first site must be the landmark, Circular Congregational Church located at 150 Meeting Street. One of the earliest established continuous Christian religious associations in the Southeastern region, and indeed among the oldest in the

continental United States, this site boasts Charleston's oldest cemetery grounds, maintaining monuments dating from 1696. The present structure is the fourth at this site and was completed in 1890 in a surprising, and for the time, somewhat daring, Romanesque revival style, also incorporating certain Gothic and Greek elements, particularly the Greek Cross interior plan and aspects of the circular design.

The circle, possibly a subliminal link here to transitions from ancient Druidic traditions and the cromlech of *Stone Henge* sifted through the exigencies of Euro-centrist interpolations of the Christian doctrine, is a recognized symbol of aspiration to spiritual perfection and completion. Thus, the shape of the edifice itself serves as an apologia for "wholeness." The original circular structure, designed by noted architect, Robert Mills, burned in the great fire of 1861 and was modeled on the Pantheon, a formerly pagan Roman temple, later converted for Christian use. The 300-year history of this Charleston congregation is as fascinating as its unusual structure which dominates the street named



specifically in honor of the function of this particular meeting place. Accessing its treasures should prove to be a more than worthwhile experience.

The second site, located in a small park at the terminus of an alley of live oak trees, is the Second Presbyterian Church at 342 Meeting Street. The exterior of the church proper is an interesting hybrid architectural structure using Roman composite columns based on the Doric Greek design and



incorporating a repeated use of tall, rectangular, clear windows topped by a demi-lune structural motif. Its square tower and octagonal belfry transform the character of the classical, temple-based first floor. A unifying, clear geometric approach sustains the aesthetic integrity of this, the oldest of the edifices of the Presbyterian denomination in the city of Charleston.

The Educational Building, adjacent to the church proper, houses a chapel – the location of works in *Thresholds*; and the fellowship hall. The relatively modern setting of the fellowship hall offers a series of stained glass panels presenting scenes from the Old and New Testaments including the Deluge, an image of the young King David, and the offering of The Ten Commandments, as well as scenes from the life of Christ. Of particular note is the Hugo Cross, mounted on the wall of the narthex, made of materials salvaged following the restoration of the sanctuary after Hurricane Hugo.

The main doors of the church are decorated with intricate latticework accented by brass points. The restraint and austerity of traditional Protestantism are exemplified in the interior decoration of the Second Presbyterian Church, and its clean, pure lines echo a stoic spiritual path wedded to the Anglo-Scotch Presbyterian tradition. In the interior of the church are striking classical motifs with stylized Doric capitals on the support columns of the main floor and Ionic capitals on the second tier of the balcony. The tall demi-lune windows of the nave admit light without the intervention of stained glass windows. However, a beautiful Palladian stained

glass triptych above the altar shows scenes from the life of Christ including a nativity, the resurrected Christ and the first Easter morning.

The Palladian reference alludes to the combination of two rectangular wings with a central, taller panel surmounted by an arched top registry – a design motif used by Italian Renaissance architect, Andrea Palladio. The demi-lune motif repeated throughout the structure is beautifully echoed in the curve of the barrel vaulted ceiling and a series of gracefully compelling arabesques in bas-relief stuccowork are on the north-most wall. The stucco relief depicts an image of the angel Gabriel sounding his trumpet, surmounting a garland of lilies of the valley – symbols of ephemerality and purity. Two angels on either end of the lily garland, shown with cherubim, are presented beneath the figure of Gabriel – one holds the seal of the Presbyterian church while the other holds the seal of the city of Charleston. This emblematic unity of Church and state eloquently alludes to a continuous, collaborative history between the church and its community.

The third site permits visitors to *Thresholds* to become immersed in the rich history of Charleston's oldest synagogue, Kalal Kodash Beth Elohim, translated from the Hebrew as "Holy Congregation House of God" located at 86 Hasell Street. The contextual significance of this congregation undergirds this particular locus as a treasure of international importance as well as being noteworthy for a strikingly significant architectural structure embodying one of the nation's most compelling examples of the American Classical Revival style. There is, perhaps, some inherent irony in the pristine clarity of the architect's reliance upon pagan-based, Greek classical motifs in a structure meant to house one of our country's most ancient Jewish congregations, established at



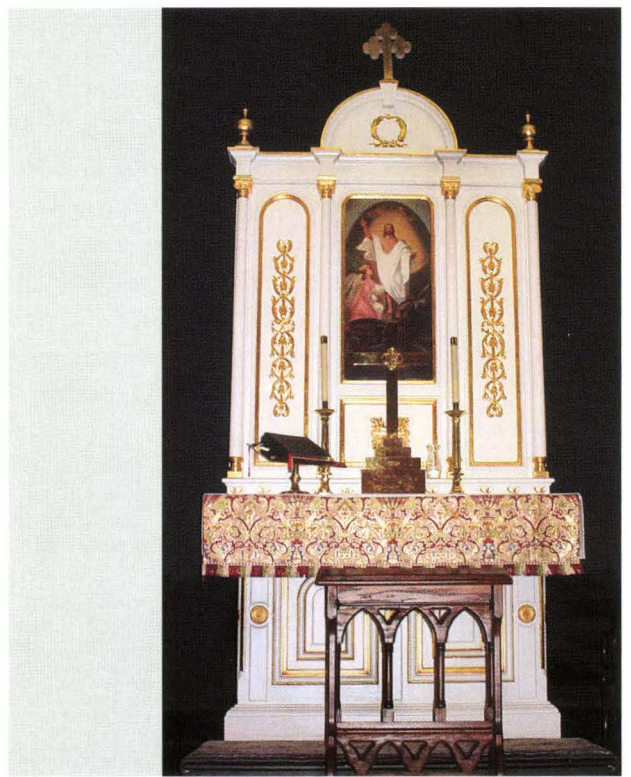
this site in 1749. The harmonious classical lines of the temple structure reflect the latest in taste and fashion of the 1840s when the building was completed following the devastating Charleston fire of 1838 which destroyed the original building that had been located on the same site.

Intriguing, even in the simplicity of its principal entry, the heavy temple doors are decorated with an elegant egg and dart motif. The doors do not open into the sanctuary or outward toward the material world, but rather, slide horizontally away from the entry – making way for the supplicant viewer and creating an added element of visual drama and ceremony. Miraculously, within the sanctuary of the present synagogue, placed on either side of the altar, the original bases of the twin candelabra, fashioned in heavy cast brass, are displayed as survivors of the 1838 fire and, in fact, dating from the very first structure built in 1795. Each candelabrum base is inscribed, and the two are placed like sentinels, framing the entry to the holiest of holies, the Arch of the Torah. These noteworthy beacons, tangible links to the past, assist in profoundly anchoring this distinguished congregation in the history of Judaism in America.

Within the sanctuary, a rich feast of visual treasures greets the senses at this extraordinary site. The predominately abstract, decorative patterns of the twelve stained glass windows contain single symbolic representational elements placed near the base of each to allude to some aspect of the practice of faith within the Jewish tradition. Varying motifs include (the representation of the Tablets of the Ten Commandments, the Star of David, the Dove of Peace denoting the end of the Deluge; and God's new covenant with humanity, among other more esoteric themes) circumnavigate the sanctuary walls illuminated by natural light serve as constant reminders of the traditions of the chosen people.

A special reward for those who look heavenward is the elegance of the ceiling decoration – a high point among many in this beautiful sanctuary. The coffered surfaces offer radiating elongated and tapered rectangles, decorated with the egg and dart motif surrounding a central design of acanthus sprigs enclosing the petals of a floral pattern. Triangular details in each ceiling corner repeat the classical egg and dart theme. The balcony is supported by four freestanding Ionic pillars with two engaged pillars of the same design embedded in the support wall of either side. This motif changes on the altar, which employs a differing classically-based interpolation of the Greek Corinthian capital pattern with its organic, acanthus plant decoration, also featured in four free-standing and two engaged pillars. The highly dramatic Corinthian motif, carried into the framing decoration of the high altar, is also repeated to great effect on the striking 19th century carving of the balustrades and tables and the rich Dominican mahogany paneling of the Arch of the Torah which constitutes the dramatic high point of the temple's interior architectural decoration.

In addition to the decorations of the sanctuary, the Pearlstine Hall for fellowship at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim



offers a delightfully animated wrought iron sculptural group of prophets by noted Charleston artist, Willard Hirsch showing two figures in antique Hebrew dress involved in what appears to be a lively debate. On the left is the Prophet of Hope and Consolation and on the right is the Prophet of Admonition. In the same hall, on the right and left walls, two murals dating from the 1950s by William Halsey portray founders and patriots of the congregation. Included in the murals are an image of the flames destroying the original building of 1794; the patriots of Beth Elohim which depicts Francis Salvador, Revolutionary patriot and legislator on horseback; and a symbolic figure representing the members of the congregation who served in the Civil War and subsequent American battles.

At the fourth site, the intimate scale of the structure and Romanized composite columns set on bases with an unexpectedly bright red principal entry door and a pedimented façade make St. Johannes Lutheran Church located at 48 Hasell Street a particularly bright spot in a quiet neighborhood side street of colonnaded porches and enclosed gardens. The classical façade's temple motif is carried out on the exterior with five engaged pilasters along the wall of each side of the building's rectangular principal structure. The whitewashed Tuscan Doric pilasters reference the type of neo-classical decoration popular at the time of the church's construction.

In the vestibule or foyer, an image of the church's name saint – the writer John or in German, Johannes – holds a book; his gospel. Opposite, St. Peter, shown with the

identifying attribute of his keys, keeps a watchful eye on the members of the public. Within the sanctuary the semi-circular arch above the altar is of a deep, cerulean blue which acts as a foil to the recently regilded and beautifully carved 19th century altar which is surmounted by paired urns and a central cross. The re-gilding of the details in the church was accomplished as a community donation by the International Guilders Society. Eight scenes from the life of Christ are shown in tall pier windows along both side aisles. A raised white gilded pulpit evokes the European tradition and the dazzling, gold-gilded carved wooden eagle – symbolizing St. John the Evangelist – is a magnificent detail of the Bible lectern at the altar. A crowning touch in the form of a compelling, intricately decorated circular cast chandelier, is centrally suspended from the high ceiling of this small and beautiful church.

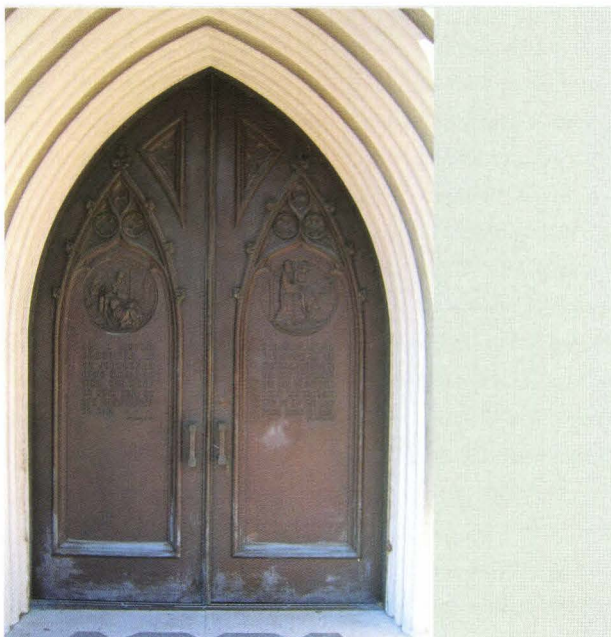
In the original, 19th century Sunday school building, known as the Taize Chapel, accessible through the fellowship hall of the church, the congregation proudly displays a mural in progress by noted Charleston artist, Manning Williams. In addition, an ecumenical monastic community in Southeastern France donated a reproduction facsimile of the Taize Cross, an image based upon a medieval French icon, of which the copy referenced here is positioned above the chapel altar. An added attraction is provided through the agency of the church pastor, the Reverend C. Lynn Bailey, who offers on view, a number of icons by his own hand in addition to other recent works of art used to decorate the chapel. The appealing quiet chapel space is also accessible through a narrow alley opening onto a gate situated on Anson Street as well as through its hortus conclusus, the church's Garden of the Beatitudes where access to this quiet, meditative space is surveyed by twin guardian facsimiles of the warrior angel, St. Michael. In the south corner of the Garden, St. Francis overlooks this intimate, private horticultural space, replete with compelling details cultivated under the loving care of the pastor's wife. A second garden space, the long narrow entry garden, accessible from Hasell Street adjacent to the church façade, gives access to the cornerstone set in 1811-1812 and beautifully engraved in German.

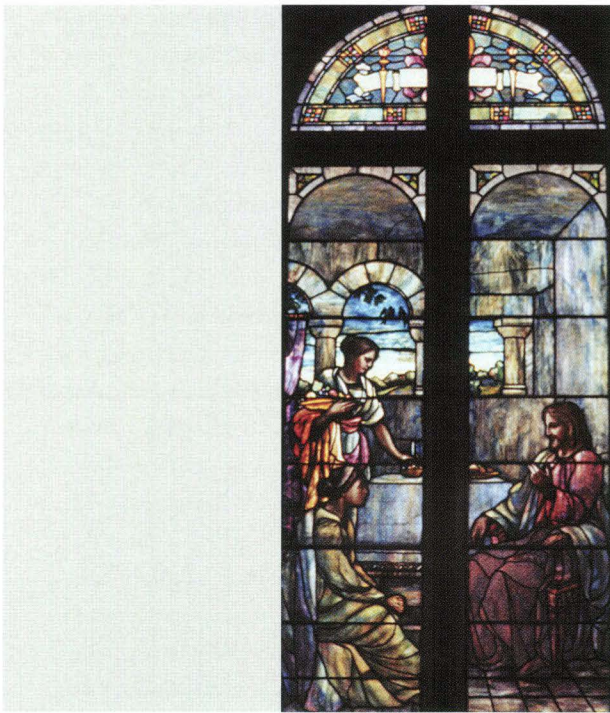
The fifth site, Grace Episcopal Church, built in 1848, is a positively exquisite example of Gothic Revival architecture. Indeed, the very walls of Grace Episcopal Church are literally works of art; that is, they are faux renderings of limestone blocks painted on a plaster support, laid over a brick infrastructure. This aesthetic innovation provides an airy lightness to the interior of this marvelously articulated structure, which is accentuated by the brilliant color and magical atmosphere, created by the beautiful collection of stained glass windows.

The stately, darkly patinated bronze-cast doors leading

into the sanctuary of the church from the exterior street, show important scenes relevant to the Christian mission taken from the gospel of St. Luke, illustrating specifically the theme of the Good Samaritan – a constant reminder of the canonical Biblical model for virtuous compassion. However, even such a pleasingly dramatic introduction is hardly sufficient preparation for the jewel-like beauty of the church interior, with its arching, ascendant, open ribbed, quadripartite groin vaulting, presented in the nave and in the side aisles, resonating a vital aesthetic experience, appearing like inverted stair steps toward the heavens. A richly hued polychromatic sequence of stained glass windows composed in a five-part polyptych, situated in the upper register of the narthex, contextualizes the Christian mission. Stained glass windows in the clerestory levels of the nave and in the side aisle stream richly colored light into the church interior and emphasize the visual drama of the intricate carving of the altar. A gleaming, intricately cast and chased brass eagle lectern dedicated in memory of Van Nest Talmage, in 1880, stands in a positively declamatory manner before the church altar. Grace Church is unquestionably a highlight among the included church interiors and is not to be missed.

At site six, established in 1865, a venerable "dowager empress" resides. Emblematic of the patrician legacy of Charleston's free persons of color and imbued with dignity, the historic St. Mark's Episcopal Church, located at 16 Thomas Street, is an ancient wood frame structure, dating from 1878, bearing intricately carved Corinthian capitals set upon Tuscan-style smooth columns, a decorative leitmotif of unadorned engaged pilasters circumnavigates the entire edifice. These details lend a stabilizing sense of vertical thrust to the overall effect of this classically inspired, temple-like structure.





St. Mark's earth-colored, Tuscan-red doors are set into an eggshell tinted exterior structure. The rich, dark interior setting with exposed, mahogany-stained wood trim is set in angled patterns on the sidewalls of the chancel. The dark

In the recession of the vaulted chancel, the painted and gilded altar, itself circa 1912, sits on three large marble slabs. This church retains a wonderfully evocative 19th century ambience. Some of the most intricately patterned stained glass from among the several sites mentioned here is to be found in St. Mark's. Of particular note are the floral and plant motifs surrounding the wonderful, swarthy, curly-haired image of the church's name saint. Placed in the chancel above the altar, the window was recreated from photographs following the devastation of Hurricane Hugo, whose ravages to the city of Charleston were transformed into a benefit for restoration and revitalization of the city as a whole and of St. Mark's, in particular.

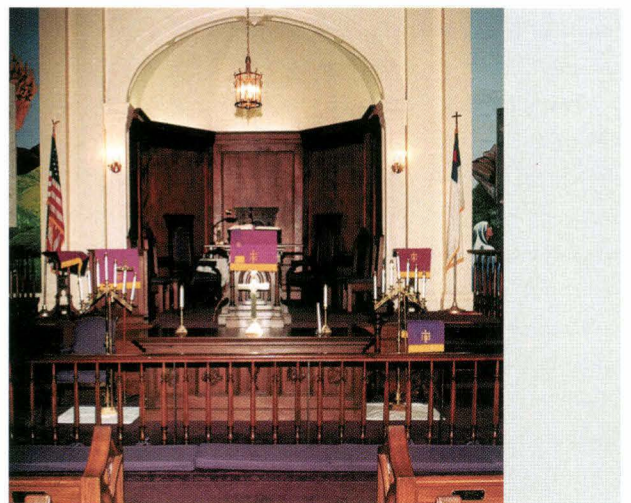
The seventh site leads us to Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church, located at 13 Morris Street. This congregation, established in 1818, is now housed in the structure whose brick masonry supports the façade of engaged pilasters. This edifice stands like a testament to the endurance and longevity of this fascinating congregation and institution. A crucial part of the Southern Civil Rights effort from the period before the coinage of the term "civil rights," Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal's congregation is credited with providing the principal means for the contrivance of the Denmark Vesey conspiracy against

Corinthian capitals set upon Tuscan-style smooth c pilasters... (these) details...lend a stabilizing sense...t

trim of the tall demi-lune stained glass windows is paired with tall, rectangular unstained fenestration. The exposed wood barrel vaulting above the chancel, shows unusual groined serpentine ribbing. In the nave of the church, the embossed tin ceiling replaces the original plaster ceiling, which was damaged during the earthquake of 1886.

The mantle of history is strongly evident in this jewel of a building. The stained glass windows represent various biblical scenes particularly from the New Testament, including the Raising of Lazarus which prefigures Christ's own resurrection; and a compelling rendition of the Pelican in her Piety – a metaphor for the sacrifice of Christ paired with the image of the Lamb of God. A fierce 19th century carved wooden eagle lectern, dating to the early 1880s, frames the chancel in conjunction with the church's most striking interior feature – the beautifully rendered covered pulpit, with its cupola-like housing supported by square, fluted piers.

institutional slavery in 1822. This historic association alone would suffice to merit a visit to the church, whose congregation was forced underground until it could be officially



revived by Bishop Payne as Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1865. In 1878, under the influence of Reverend B. F. Porter, Morris Brown became prominently involved in the back-to-Africa movement and several families from the congregation immigrated to Liberia, West Africa – many of whom became extremely prominent in the Liberian community. This site should be visited for its rich history and prominent role in advocating Civil Rights for all citizens of our nation.

The final site, Morris Street Baptist Church, located at 25 Morris Street in Charleston is a vital community force. Its stalwart brick structure betokens the function of the church



as an anchor for community leadership, and the church's outreach activities have been a vital part of its history since it was established in May of 1865. Before entering the sanctuary, in the vestibule foyer, three contemporary murals

many religious traditions – is highlighted by ten panels of stylized contemporary stained glass windows, two terminating end panels near the entry to the sanctuary depict scenes from the life of Christ, including his crucifixion.

Unfortunately, these two end panels are partially obscured by the addition of a balcony level in the church interior. Appealing structural details in the sanctuary include a centrally placed interior ceiling dome, surrounded by three concentric circles of darkened, antiqued gold gilding, a recessed semi-circular altar, and a stabilizing leitmotif of paired, engaged piers circumnavigating the sanctuary walls. A focal highlight in this pleasing sea of pale blue and white tones is the airy lightness of faded blue tiles in the recessed baptismal font in the deepest recess of the altar alcove. Information provided in the church brochure indicates that the building was completely renovated in 1954, and its openness, lightness, with blond wood pews and details, provides a sense of serene modernity, which forms a considerable part of its current appeal.

In conclusion, the intellectual motivation of the exhibition, *Thresholds: Expressions of Art and Spiritual Life*, provides an opportunity for the art community and the denizens of the South Carolina community at-large to enhance our collective awareness of a significant aspect of the reflective spiritual

ns, a decorative leitmotif of unadorned engaged
his classically inspired, temple-like structure.

by Brunson Wright show this congregation's support of modern artists.

The first of the Wright murals, dated 1977 shows the *Last Supper* or *Installation of the Eucharist* based upon a composition following the Santa Maria delle Grazie picture by Leonardo da Vinci. A bright and optimistic acrylic work, this painting provides a central feature for the entering worshippers, reminding them of the sacrifices associated with the Christian legacy. Two later works in the same area placed on end walls show, on the right, when entering from the main door on Morris Street, *Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane* and on the left, an image of the Resurrection. These works are a testament to the role of contemporary art or community artworks in animating and revitalizing spaces intended for spiritual edification.

The restrained appeal of the large, spacious blue and white sanctuary – colors often associated with spirituality in

culture that has evolved with an exceptional diversity throughout this unique city so aligned to the American search for spiritual and religious edification and its aesthetic legacy. The partnership of art as a tangible manifestation of an evanescent interior expression of internal metaphysical realities, with the intangible constructs of spirituality, is wondrously crystallized in this collaborative effort. *Thresholds* demonstrates that fundamental human truths unite the spiritual and physical realms in the experiences, objects and ideas realized through the creative processes of artists, architects, and craft-based cultural workers in their artistic productions extending from *terra firma* heavenwards.

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THRESHOLDS

Begins its regional tour in 2004.

For more information, contact the South Carolina Arts Commission
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